

তারিখ ... NOV. 25, 1999 ...

পৃষ্ঠা: ৫ কলাম: ১

## EKUSHEY

# International Recognition and N

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*International recognition must not make us oblivious of our obligation in commemorating the spirit and martyrdom of those whom no sacrifice was too great to establish the right to mother tongue-Bangla, the language spoken by nearly 1 billion people the world over.*

THE UNESCO's proclamation of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day in commemoration of the martyrs, who made supreme sacrifices in the streets of Dhaka for the realisation of the rightful place of Bangla on this very day in 1952, has, no doubt, made the entire nation jubilant. Every Bengalee, wherever he may be, will naturally feel ecstatic and proud at this happy augury. From the very first year of the new millennium the observance of the Ekushey (21st February) will, thus, have special significance in the sense that the day will also be equally observed in the one hundred eighty-eight member countries of the UNESCO. In its resolution the UNESCO has rightly observed that the recognition has been given keeping in mind that all moves for the promotion of dissemination of mother tongues will not only encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education, but also develop fuller awareness about linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world as well as inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue. The move for this recognition by the UNESCO was first taken by a Canada-based group of expatriate Bangladeshis. They prepared the ground work and notified the Bangladesh Education Ministry to formally place the proposal for inclusion in the resolution of the Second Commission of the UN affiliated body. After its approval by the Commission the Plenary session put the seal of formality.

According to the UNESCO's estimate there are no less than four thousand languages prevalent all over the world. Twentyfirst February has been chosen for symbolising the quest for international recognition of the mother tongues considering the protracted san-

guinary struggle waged by the Bengalee students and cultural activists for protecting the sanctity of their language. This day in 1952 left an indelible imprint in the shaping of the destiny of the Bengalee nation which had been groping in wilderness and under colonial subjugation for centuries. The students and the cultural activists backed by intellectuals, notably the teachers stood boldly against the machinations of cultural domination. They could rightly realise that if they did not resolutely resist the imposition by brutal force of an alien culture and language the very identity of the Bengalee nation might be in jeopardy.

It is axiomatic that colonial domination follows cultural domination. With bloods oozing out from their hearts they charted a brave new course steadfastly following which the nation subsequently wrested its long-cherished independence and emerged as a sovereign country. International recognition of Ekushey has, therefore, catapulted the nation to its dignified placement in the global context and brought for the martyrs of the historic Language Movement the honour they universally deserved. They now have been acclaimed as the source of inspiration all over the world in the same line as the self-sacrificing workers of the Hay Market in Chicago who laid down their lives on the first day of the month of May over a century ago for establishing their inalienable rights. Ekushey will now happily be equated with the May Day — its

an event of great exuberance and elation for all the Bengali speaking people in general and the Bangladeshis in particular.

International recognition of Ekushey has at the same time calls for due national obligation in respect of upholding its immortal spirit. There is a myopic tendency in this country of politicising every achievement putting the tag of a particular political party on it. This rare occasion should be spared of such a narrow and partisan attitude but should be shared equally by all citizens, irrespective of party affiliations. The martyrs of the language movement had but one identity — they were patriots par excellence and they bequeathed to us the tradition of rising above individual or party consideration. The eternal flame of the spirit of Ekushey further teaches us to safeguard our cultural heritage. The best way to do so is to stop the infiltration of alien culture and erosion of moral values. Bangla language and literature should receive the fullest patronisation of all quarters. The spirit of Ekushey also encompasses the spread of education to all segments of the society in every nook and cranny of the country in right earnest and to lift the standard of education to its desired level. Unfortunately we are yet to have a pragmatic education policy suiting the needs of time and genius of the masses.

But what is so very unfortunate is that even after nearly forty-eight years of the martyrdom of the heroes of the language movement we are yet to

to write off 100 billion dollar of debt," said Anna Pettifor, director Jubilee 2000 UK. "No, this agreement is in jeopardy. The G7 should meet again because countries like Mozambique and Rwanda cannot wait while creditors haggle."

The enhanced package would supplement the larger 'Heavily Indebted Poor Country' (HIPC) debt initiative run by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). As many as 3 of the 41 HPCs were expected to qualify for the G7 programme.

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The Language Movement had deftly spelt out the outline of a possible Language policy in its booklet circulated on September 16 of the same year. We can take cue from it. Tamuddin Majlish had proposed that Bangla would be the state language, official language and the medium of instruction. English would, however, be retained as the intentional language. We now have Bengali and English medium schools side by side as well as various religious institutions with no common syllabi. Education, to be effective and productive, must be secular and common for all citizens. This had been also a constitutional obligation. But nothing tangible has so far been done in this regard.

Ekushey still now is observed ritually — laying of wreaths at the Central Shahid Minar and its countless replicas all over the country, organising musical soirees, bestowing of medals, holding seminars, symposia, book fairs etc. These are merely adulations and adorations. But much more important is to emulate and hold high the true spirit of Ekushey with a bottom-up approach now that the day has received international recognition. International recognition must not make us oblivious of our national obligation in commemorating the spirit and