

**English translation:**

Bangladesh is a very patriotic nation. The people of this country never tolerated any unfairness. So the Bangladeshi did not accept it when the Urdu language was forced [on us] as the state language of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). At first it was the student unions that revolted, but later on it turned into a mass revolution. In February 1952, the tyrants ignored the verdict of the general public and announced that only Urdu will be the state language of the whole of Pakistan, including the province of East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh). The Bangladeshis (Bengalis in East Pakistan) were enraged by this decision. All over East Pakistan, especially in the rebellious students' society, there were signs of revolution. In the capital Dhaka, and elsewhere in the country, the mob defied [the authorities]. The whole country was engaged in meetings, processions and slogans. "We want Bengali as the state language," "You cannot deny us our mother tongue," etc., were among the many slogans used in these processions.

An order under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code prohibiting processions and meetings in Dhaka city was promulgated. Police opened fired at Bangladeshi students near Dhaka Medical College Hospital to repress the revolution and beat them up. In 1952, the students of Bangladesh were not involved with the war as the *Mukti Bahini* (Bangladesh guerrillas, as they were popularly known) was in 1971. Yet, on hearing the news of the shootings, thousands thronged the Dhaka Medical College Hospital area, disregarding the police's bullets, to pay respect to the language martyrs. To protest against the shooting and the killing of the students, a strike was called all over Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). The streets of Dhaka and other cities were flooded with the blood of the martyrs. The tyrannical government tried its best to stop the protests, but they were not successful. For Bangladesh ... Bangladeshi .... The students continued protesting the loss of lives dedicated to the Bengali language. Through this bloodshed, they kept *Ekushey* February (February 21) immortal. The blood of the martyrs did not go to waste. Many of the dead bodies were not delivered to their relatives. They were buried with great secrecy. Salam and Barkat were the most famous among the martyrs. Their dead bodies were secretly buried in the Azimpur cemetery. But this could not be kept a secret for too long. With the killing of the students, the revolution in Bangladesh took a serious turn. Eventually, the government at that time was forced to announce that both Bengali and Urdu would be used as the state languages of Pakistan.

*Ekushey* February is immortal, and the memories of *Ekushey* February will stay alive in the hearts of Bengalis forever. So, every year this day is commemorated with due respect. At the stroke of midnight, barefooted and with the Bangladesh flag in their hands, everyone assembles to start the procession towards Azimpur, to visit the graves of the martyrs and pay their respects. While walking they sing the song "*Amar bhai-er rokte rangano Ekushey* February, *ami ki bhulite pari.*"<sup>1</sup> Then, when the procession reaches

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<sup>1</sup> A song commemorating the martyrs of the Language Movement. It translates to: "Can I ever forget *Ekushey* February, a day bathed crimson with the blood of my brothers?"

Azimpur, everyone presents their flowers and garlands at the grave and they all make an oath themselves. They will never let the blood of the martyrs go to waste. They will build up Bangladesh. At dawn, the streets of Dhaka are packed with people. Many memorials are published on this day, to commemorate the martyrs. And these are also sold. Various organizations arrange events. The day goes by with people showing their respect towards the martyrs in different ways. Many had lost their lives to establish Bengali as the state language. That is why we value this day so much, and [why] revering this day should be our duty towards the country.

**About CultureTalk:** CultureTalk is produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and housed on the LangMedia Website. The project provides students of language and culture with samples of people talking about their lives in the languages they use everyday. The participants in CultureTalk interviews and discussions are of many different ages and walks of life. They are free to express themselves as they wish. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants. Inclusion in CultureTalk does not represent endorsement of these ideas or opinions by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, Five Colleges, Incorporated, or any of its member institutions: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

