Language movement

The question as to what would be the state language of Pakistan was raised immediately after its creation.

- The first movement on this issue was mobilised by Tamaddun Majlish headed by Professor Abul Kashem. Gradually many other non-communal and progressive organisations joined the movement, which finally turned into a mass movement. Serious preparation was being taken in various forums of the central government of Pakistan under the initiative of Fazlur Rahman, the central education minister, to make Urdu the only state language of Pakistan.

- On receipt of this information, East Pakistani students became agitated and held a meeting on the Dhaka University campus on 6 December 1947, demanding that Bangla be made one of the state languages of Pakistan.

- The first Rasthabhasa Sangram Parishad (Language Action Committee) was formed towards the end of December with Professor Nurul Huq Bhuiyan of Tamaddun Majlish as the convener.

- The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan proposed that the members would have to speak either in Urdu or in English at the Assembly.

- Dhirendranath Datta, a member from the East Pakistan Congress Party, moved an amendment motion to include Bangla as one of the languages of the Constituent Assembly.

- The central leaders, including Liaquat Ali Khan, prime minister of Pakistan, and Khwaja Nazimuddin, chief minister of East Bengal, opposed the motion.

- On receiving the news that the motion had been rejected, students, intellectuals and politicians of East Pakistan became agitated.

- A new committee to fight for Bangla as the state language was formed with Shamsul Huq as convener. On 11 March 1948 a general strike was observed in the towns of East Pakistan in protest against the omission of Bangla from the languages of the Constituent Assembly, the absence of Bangla letters in Pakistani coins and stamps, and the use of only Urdu in recruitment tests for the navy.

- Amidst processions, picketing and slogans, leaders such as Shawkat Ali, Kazi Golam Mahboob, Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Wahed and others were arrested. Student leaders, including Abdul Matin and Abdul Malek Ukil, also took part in the procession and picketing.

- A meeting was held on the Dhaka University premises. Strikes were observed from 12 March to 15 March.

- Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the governor general of Pakistan, came to visit East Pakistan on 19 March. He addressed two meetings in Dhaka, in both of which he ignored the popular demand for Bangla. He reiterated that Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan.

- This declaration was instantly protested with the Language Movement spreading throughout East Pakistan. The Dhaka University Language Action Committee was formed on 11 March 1950 with Abdul Matin as its convener.

- By the beginning of 1952, the Language Movement took a serious turn. Both Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan were dead - Jinnah on 11 September 1948 and Liaquat Ali Khan on 16 October 1951. Khwaja Nazimuddin had succeeded Liaquat Ali Khan as prime minister of Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan started losing faith in the Muslim League. A new party, the Awami Muslim League - which would later
become the awami league—was formed under the leadership of maulana abdul hamid khan bhasani in 1949.

- Under these circumstances, the Language Movement got a new momentum in 1952.

On 27 January 1952, Khwaja Nazimuddin came to Dhaka from Karachi. Addressing a meeting at Paltan Maidan, he said that the people of the province could decide what would be the provincial language, but only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan.

- A strike was observed at Dhaka University on 30 January. At this time the government also proposed that Bangla be written in Arabic script. This proposal was also vehemently opposed. The Language Action Committee decided to call a hartal and organise demonstrations and processions on February 21 throughout East Pakistan.

- As preparations for demonstrations were underway, the government imposed Section 144 in the city of Dhaka, banning all assemblies and demonstrations.

- The students were determined to violate Section 144 and held a student meeting at 11.00 a.m. on 21 February on the Dhaka University campus, then located close to the Medical College Hospital.

- The students then started throwing brickbats at the police, who retaliated with tear gas. The police fired upon the crowd of students, who were proceeding towards the Assembly Hall (at present, part of Jagannath Hall, University of Dhaka). Three young men, rafiq uddin ahmed, abdul jabbar and abul barkat (an MA student of Political Science) were fatally wounded.

- The next day, 22 February, was also a day of public demonstrations and police reprisals. On 23 February, at the spot where students had been killed, a memorial was erected. In 1963, the temporary structure was replaced by a concrete memorial, the shaheed minar (martyrs’ memorial).

- The East Bengal Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution recommending the recognition of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan. The language movement continued until 1956. The movement achieved its goal by forcing the Pakistan Constituent Assembly in adopting both Bangla and Urdu as the state languages of Pakistan.

- Since 1952, 21 February has been observed every year to commemorate the martyrs of the Language Movement. With UNESCO adopting a resolution on 17 November 1999 proclaiming 21 February as international mother language day.

**Importance of Language Movement in 1952**

» The Language Movement is one of the most important days in our history.

It has been suggested that the freedom struggle of Bangladesh originated from the Bengali language movement. In a way this is correct, as the basic inspiration for the freedom struggle of the Bengali-speaking people of Pakistan came mainly from linguistic nationalism.

» Language is the prime carrier of a culture. It is also the most powerful instrument of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. During the course of world history, many cultures and civilizations have been shattered, devastated and crushed because of the demolition of their languages.
Language is not only the principal representative of a culture of one nation but it also creates sense of patriotism and nationalism in people’s mind. Bengali and Bangla language is an appropriate example of that. Bengali people created one of the greatest political and cultural histories in the 20th century. The events of 21 February 1952 proved that a nation which is strong and powerful politically cannot destroy a spirited civilized nation if they have a unifying language like Bangla.

The General Election of 1954 and the language Issue:
In March 1954, The United Front pledged that if they won in election, the following steps would be taken:

- Bengali will be made one of the state languages of Pakistan.
- Arrangements will be made to impart education through the mother tongue only.

Mass Upsurge of 1969 and the Bengali Language:

- The vanguard of the anti-Ayub Mass Movement was the 'All Party Students Committee of Action' which, on the basis of an 11-point program, successfully directed the mass upsurge and brought about Ayub's fall. One of the points of the program was "Education at all levels must be given through the mother tongue: Bengali language must be introduced in the law courts and government offices."
- Challenged the founding ideology of Pakistan as well as “Two Nation Theory”.
- The killing of language movement led to bitter feelings among East Pakistanis and they were a major factor in the push for independence.

That created sense of patriotism and nationalism in people’s mind.