

**SAARC Literary Festival**  
**Inaugural session**

Speech by

**Sheikh Hasina**

Hon'ble Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

The chair,  
Dear colleagues,  
Guests from home and abroad,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and Very Good Morning to you all.

In the month of Language Movement, I welcome you all in this fine morning of Bangla month of Falgun.

Falgun returns time and again in the lives of Bangalees with a unique feeling. One of the important and emotion-charged incidents of Bangalee nation is closely linked to this month.

The heroic sons of the soil sacrificed their lives in the Falgun of 1952 to foil the conspiracy of the then rulers against our mother tongue Bangla and demanding making Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan.

The resurrection of Bangalee's thousand years cultural identity and the rise Bangalee Nationalism took place following the blood-stained path of Ekushey.

Thus Falgun, the month of blossoming Simul-Palash, becomes a month of emotion and merriment in one hand, on the other, it is the month of rebellion for Bangalees.

I pay my deep respect to the memories of the Language Martyrs. I also pay my homage to one of the pioneers of Language Movement and the Greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I recall with gratitude the memories of the martyrs of our war of liberation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The riverine Bangladesh blessed with bounty of natural beauty is also a fertile land of literary and cultural activities. The people of this land in one hand are firm in character, hardworking, and on the other, they are soft and passionate in human qualities.

The people of this soil have been fighting against injustice, misrule and ill-attempts for time immemorial. They had fought against the misrule of Mughal-Pathan-Pakistani rulers. When rulers of the Pakistan state, emerged on the basis of two-nation theory, had tried to impose Urdu as the state language on Bangalees, the entire nation raised their voice against the unjust decision. They protected the dignity of Bangla sacrificing their blood. The language movement that started under the leadership of young student leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1948 culminated through the bloodshed in 1952.

Since then, Ekushey was not only confined to the struggle for protecting the nobility of Bangla, but also it has emerged as a guiding force of Bangalee nation. Ekushey honed our mindset and values as well as sharpened ourselves regarding our legitimate rights.

The Ekushey gets a new dimension in 1999 during our previous rule when the UN recognised it as the International Mother Language Day. 193 countries of the world are now observing the day as a sources of inspiration to protect and develop their mother tongue. I recall with gratitude the initiative of expatriate Rafiqul Islam and Salam.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the medieval era to the present date, the fertile land of Bangla produced numerous poets and littérateurs. It would be rare instance that an educated Bangalee youth did not write two lines of poetry. Not only the educated ones, the self-educated bauls and bards of this soil have enriched our literature and songs. The potters, blacksmiths and carpenters are also unique creative artists of Bangladesh.

Fakir Lalon Shah, Siraj Sai of yesterday years or Shah Abdul Karim or Radha Raman Dutta all enlightened our hearts and souls by their works.

Poet Alaol, Abdul Hakim, Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar, Michael Madhusidhan Dutta, Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Jasimuddin, Jibabnananda, Shamsur Rahman have sharpened our sphere of mind. Some of them got recognition in the international arena.

Rabindranath Tagore, winning the Nobel laureate in 1913, presented Bangla language and literature to the international arena. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered his speech in the UN General Assembly in 1974 and thereby introduced our mother tongue to the international community.

The literature not only arouses the artistic bent of our mind but also works as a lighthouse of a nation. Literature is the highway of human history. Traveling through this highway, people across the world are interconnected.

The SAARC countries are interlinked in respect of history, tradition and literature-culture and language. The geographical boundaries separated the people, but their mindset, and hopes and aspirations are identical.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Whether it is politics or literature, all is directed towards improving the living standard of the citizens. I frequently mention that the main problem of this region is poverty. We have to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

It is my firm belief that if we work together, the SAARC nations will be able to come out of the poverty cycle at the earliest. To achieve the goal, a close connectivity would have to be built up among the people of this region.

We the politicians and the people of literary arena can work together in this field. I think, the people of cultural arena can contribute more in building fraternity among people and nations as literature and culture do not abide by the geographical boundaries. The connectivity among people can eradicate differences, inequality and darkness.

Another issue I want to raise here. It is about the sprouting of terrorism, militancy and extremism. Illiteracy, lack of proper education and religious fanaticism help sprouting militancy and extremism. Our achievement would go into vain if we can not resist the spread of terrorism, militancy and fanaticism. You can do a lot in this field.

I believe that life-oriented literature can help a person return back from brutality and violence.

Let us come and work together to build a poverty-free and peaceful South Asia.

Finally, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me at such a wonderful gathering. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the guests came from abroad. I hope your stay in our country would be enjoyable and joyful.

With these few words, I declare the SARRC Literary Festival open.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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