

IML Presidential Discourse

Ex-President gives talk on ‘language’ in the context of national development at NSU



“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”

- This historical statement of the late US President John F Kennedy was echoed one more time at the *Institute of Modern Languages* at NSU when it offered its summer event of *IML Discourse I* – a high-profile co-curricular lecture series perceived to be the most prestigious of its kind in South Asia and beyond.

The discourse was attended by students of NSU, DU and BUET.

The *Institute of Modern Languages* presented the discourse on **Language in the Context of National Development** on June 17, 2012. *IML Discourse I* is an academic innovation that inspires students' research into language and language behavior from novel perspectives and enriches them with the valuable thoughts of eminent personalities who

make a careful, intelligent and strategic use of language to achieve their objectives in their respective fields of activity.

The discourse “Language and Development” was initiated by Mohammed Shahedul Haque, Head of the Institute of Modern Languages at NSU. He said that while understanding language as a means of communication, we hardly make any association between language and a nation’s journey towards prosperity. Nevertheless, the inevitable relationship between language and development can never be ignored as conceptualization and implementation of social, economic and political transformations and developments depend on knowledge, and acquisition, dissemination and application of knowledge depend on communication and thus **language** - the primary means of communication - enters into a relationship with the development of a nation.

Language in the context of national development was discussed at length in an enthralling speech of Professor Dr. A. Q. M. Badruddoza Chowdhury, President of People's Republic of Bangladesh (2001-2002), former deputy prime minister and former minister of education, health and foreign affairs of Bangladesh Government. He held his audience spellbound with his life-long observation and experience of **language** in the transformation of a nation. His stirring discourse broadened the narrowed meaning of “language and development” and widened the horizons of today’s youth by making them enthusiastic to embark on the nation’s journey towards prosperity. It may be mentioned that this was Prof B Chowdhury’s second visit to NSU. His paid his first visit in 2002 when he was the President of Bangladesh, and now, 10 years later, this visit in 2012 is his coming to NSU as a teacher and member of the Institute Faculty (IML, NSU).

Language in Relation to Education and Development:

In his power-point presentation the former Bangladesh President Prof B. Chowdhury systematically explained the significance of **language** in a country like Bangladesh where the citizens had to struggle hard to uphold the right to speak in their mother tongue! He said **language** is there in our blood and history. The influence of the British rule, popular culture and religious values has made this country quite an exception where the influence of three **languages** - Bangla, English and, to some extent, Arabic - can be seen. **Language**, he said, is deeply interwoven with culture. Therefore, the beauty of these **languages** has adorned this nation with multiple cultures. Nevertheless, one cannot survive without **language** and **language** cannot be enriched without education. Therefore, proper, well-rounded education is the backbone of a nation. The national development of any country is

also impossible without the careful application of appropriate knowledge and knowledge requires **language** and communication to survive and reach people at all levels. Hence, **language** and development influence each other.

The former Head of State said that these two significant entities, **language** and development, are associated with politics as only knowledgeable people can contribute to develop politics as well as **language**. He emphasized that this knowledge does not necessarily mean “the text-book knowledge”, but the knowledge of real-life that enables someone to become “empathetic” towards people rather than “sympathetic.”

The former President commented that **language** is not a mere product of letters and sounds. There is more to this definition than meets the eye. Someone can express his or her view through gesture and sign **language**. A dance performance can mesmerize the audience due to its artistic elegance. He illuminated that human aspirations, desires, hope, love, frustration, and social, economic and political conditions - all are involved in the development of a **language**. The **language** that has been used 500 years ago e.g. the literature of Geoffrey Chaucer is unintelligible now.

The Influence of Three Languages:

The former President stated that the influence of three **languages** of Bengali, English, and, to some extent, Arabic has a major impact in our education as well. The nature of education differs from the rural areas to towns. In the capital city, there are English medium schools that emulate schools in the UK, the USA, Australia and other developed countries and they teach in the English **language**. He said that the English medium schools focus very little on the history and the national **language** of Bangladesh because the textbooks are not written by Bangladeshi intellectuals. Therefore, he said, students cannot relate to their origin and the common people. On the other hand, there are Bangla medium schools in cities as well as in rural areas in Bangladesh. They try to uphold both Bengali and English.

The former President said that we are taught the Arabic **language** from our childhood but anyone barely understands the meaning; therefore, we fail to find out the treasures of the Noble Quran, which is not only a wonderful piece of literature, but also indispensable in cultivating the good qualities of the human personality important for the development of a peace-loving, progressive society. He beautifully recited a few verses of the Noble Quran in Arabic for the students, such as,

“My Lord! Have mercy upon my parents as they cherished me in my childhood”

“Our Lord, give us what is good in this world and also what is good in the Hereafter
And save us from the torment of Fire”

and said that we hardly understand what we say in Arabic in prayers. These are pearls of great value for the humanity.

Dr. Chowdhury emphasized general knowledge and all-rounded education and said students should earn both. He said that to earn a good livelihood, education is important, and having proper, well-rounded education is very important to elevate the mental status which is important for the development of a progressive society.

An Ideal Situation and Development:

The former Head of State said that proper development can bring an ideal situation and the leader of development must be an honest, educated, political personality who possesses patriotism, who not only loves the geography, soil and flag of the country, but most importantly loves the people. The leader must have clear foresight and must be aware of the problems of the common people. Only knowing people by pen and paper cannot make someone “empathetic” for the country people. He called upon the students to build a nation which has no corruption, no terrorism, no communalism and where people can enjoy all the legitimate rights. He also stated that only dreaming is not enough, acting on it is more important.

He elucidated that lack of vision and lack of efficiency of the leaders who are the major development overseers are the stumbling blocks to development. They do not understand the **language** of the people but unfortunately they understand every **language** of corruption. Therefore, now elevating the standards of government machinery is of great importance for which we need proper education and training.

“It’s like walking in to a Harvard classroom”:

This beautiful, invaluable discourse ended with an enthusiastic question-answer session where former president pointed out that knowing a lot of **languages** is important, but to know a **language** one must appreciate the literary treasures that have adorned these **languages**. Knowing **languages** can enable someone to reach the heart of the people and enjoy the beauty of creatures. As English is the lingua franca, we must know English to

communicate with the development partners, the non-government organizations and to analyze the development stories of other countries. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to neglect our own mother tongue that resides in the core of the common people. At the same time, we must respect the **dialects and tribal languages** and take an attempt to develop them. Thus, this intriguing discourse captivated the minds of today's youth and made them enthusiastic to embark on the journey of national development.

When asked what he thought about the class, an ex-DU student replied, "It's like walking in to a Harvard classroom. Thanks to NSU for arranging the most memorable class in my life!"

Written by the RIT