

Press Release

Colombo, 21st February 2024

Colombo marks International Mother Language Day with grand celebrations

Bangladesh High Commission, Colombo observed the International Mother Language Day - 2024 this morning at the historic Independence Square under the patronage of Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena. Sri Lankan Education Minister Dr. Susil Premajayanth and Foreign Minister M.U.M. Ali Sabry were the Guests of Honour. The programme was also attended by the visiting Bangladesh Agriculture Minister Dr. Md. Abdus Shahid, Head of Diplomatic missions and UN organizations, Chairman of Official Languages Commission of Sri Lanka, high government officials, political leaders and other high dignitaries. With the participation of cultural & media personalities, academia, intellectuals, language professionals, language institutes, and hundreds of students and scouts from schools across the island, the Independence Square turned into a grand assembly of different language speakers. This year's theme was "Celebrating Mother Languages".

Dignitaries scribbled with paint and brush on canvas the word "Mother" in their own languages to express their solidarity with all mother tongues of the world. A one-minute silence was observed at the beginning of the programme in memory of the Language Martyrs of Bangladesh. The theme song (immortal *Ekushey* song) was rendered by Sri Lanka's Muslim Choral Ensemble.

For this occasion, under the patronage of the High Commission, Sri Lankan Education Ministry had launched an island-wide Essay Writing and Art competition for children two months back. In today's event, the nine winners received their awards and certificates from high dignitaries.

An enthralling multilingual cultural performance was the main attraction of the observance featuring the Muslim Choral Ensemble; Department of Performing Arts, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo; University of Visual and Performing Arts; Royal College; as well as artists of Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Russian House, Maldivian Educational and Cultural Centre, Nippon BizTech Institute, Roots of Lanka Foundation, and SAARC Cultural Centre. They performed in as many as nine different languages (Bangla, Sinhala, Tamil, Pali, Vedda, Hindi, Russian, Japanese and Dhivehi) showcasing diverse cultural traditions and love for mother tongue in the forms of song, dance, and recitation.

Education Minister Dr. Premajayanth, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry, and Acting UN Resident Coordinator Azusa Kubota briefly spoke on the occasion. They appreciated the initiative of Bangladesh High Commission and underscored the importance of preservation of mother tongues and linguistic diversity. In his welcome remarks, High Commissioner of Bangladesh Tareq Md Ariful Islam reflected on significance of the Day for Bangladesh, its historical perspective and the role of mother tongues in uniting the humanity.

The observance was arranged in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka with support of UN Offices in Colombo and Scouts Association of Sri Lanka.

Three prestigious public universities--University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna & University of Sri Jayewardenepura, hosted an academic conference today to celebrate the International Mother Language Day with Bangladesh High Commissioner Tareq Ariful Islam as Guest of Honour. He also spoke at that event.

A blood-donation camp was also arranged by the High Commission in association with Sri Lanka Scouts Association and General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University Hospital.

The Day's in-house observance began at the Chancery early morning with ceremonial hoisting of the national flag at half-mast followed by one-minute of silence and special prayers for the Language Martyrs and reading out messages of high dignitaries of Bangladesh.

The observance was widely covered in the local media.

