



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Dhaka Newsletter

ISSUE No. 3

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The Significance of International Mother Language Day

There are about 280 million people speaking Bangla around the world today, making this either the fourth or fifth most widely spoken language by different international standards.

UNESCO declared 21 February as International Mother Language Day (IMLD) and since 2000, it has been observed throughout the world.

“All languages are linked through their origins and borrowing, but each is a unique source of meaning for understanding, writing and expressing reality,” said Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO.

“Mother languages, along with linguistic diversity, matter for the identity of individuals. As sources of creativity and vehicles for cultural expression, they are also important for the health of societies. At the same time, we

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“ Mother language instruction is a powerful way to fight discrimination and reach out to marginalised populations. ”

– Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO

do more to support the balanced development of translation, as a channel to open to all the great diversity of knowledge and experience throughout the world.”

21 February is the anniversary of a most memorable day in Bangladesh’s history; it is a national day to commemorate protests and sacrifices to protect Bangla (Bengali) as a national language during the Bengali Language Movement of 1952.

Following the partition of India in 1947, there was economic, cultural and linguistic tension between East and West Pakistan. The Pakistan government declared Urdu as the sole national language in 1948, which led to protests throughout the Bengali-speaking population. On 21 February 1952, students at the University of Dhaka organized a protest which resulted with the police opening fire and the consequent deaths of four students.

Each year, Bangladesh honors the day as well as the month of February by organizing different activities, particularly the month-long Ekushey Book Fair to pay homage to the martyrs of February 21.

The celebration of IMLD was organized by the Ministry of Education at the International Mother Language Institute where her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the Honorable Prime Minister of Government of



the People's Republic of Bangladesh, inaugurated the four-day long activities, while the Honorable Education Minister, Mr Nurul Islam Nahid MP presided over the programmes. Dr. Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, Secretary, Ministry of Education presented the key note speech by expressing the significance of language, particularly the mother tongue.

"The International Mother Language Day is a very significant day in the history of Bangladesh," stated her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Honorable Prime Minister Bangladesh, in the publication on the occasion of IMLD 2011. "On 15 March 2001, we took initiative to establish an International Language Institute in Bangladesh. In 2010, the Language Institute was formally inaugurated and in the same year, the Language Institute Act was passed in the National Assembly."

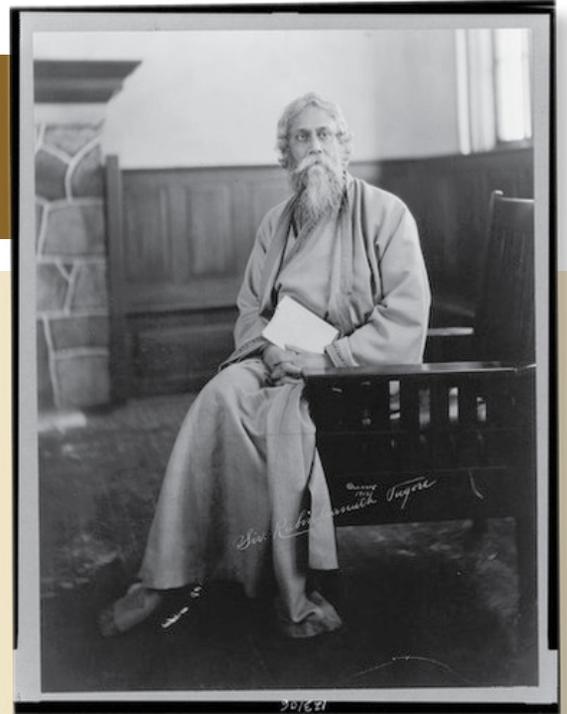
Mother tongue language instruction comprises an integral component of Education for All, which is the priority of UNESCO Dhaka. UNESCO continues to work closely with government and NGOs to advocate the importance of education, to develop the capacity of personnel, and to promote networking and information management through Information and Communication Technology to realize the goals of Education for All.



Remembering Tagore

*Today it is heaped at your feet, it has found its end in you
The love of all man's days both past and forever:
Universal joy, universal sorrow, universal life.
The memories of all loves merging with this one love of ours –
And the songs of every poet past and forever."*

"Unending Love", written 1889



Celebrations from around the world are already underway to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of legendary Bengali poet and dramatist, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941).

"Dramatization of Tagore's Literature" is a part of a literary outreach campaign to remind the public of the poet's legacy on his birth anniversary. Ten young playwrights from Bangladesh and fourteen from India have been selected to be a part of this project that will begin in June 2011. It is being sponsored by the International Theatre Institute, a global theatre platform that promotes theatre for world peace and as a means of cultural exchange under the umbrella of UNESCO. Tagore's short stories, novels and poems will be dramatized into an anthology of 24 plays.

There will also be a 3-day long cultural session from 6 – 8 May 2011 at the National Theatre Auditorium of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, National Museum Auditorium and Bangla Academy. Bangladesh and India have decided to jointly celebrate the occasion by holding formal inaugural sessions in both their respective capitals. The Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh is expected to be the chief guest and other dignitaries, Tagore experts, singers, artists and poets are expected to attend.

Tagore's literary career stretched over a span of more than sixty years and contained a thriving collection of poetry, drama, novels/short stories, and essay literature. In the book, *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore*, Mohit K. Ray claims that "no other poet – Vyas, Valmiki, Homer, Shelley, Keats, Heine or Goethe – is comparable with him; all things considered Tagore is simply matchless".

Literary historian, J.C Ghosh, observed that "his English translations; his paintings; his travels and lecture-tours in Asia, America and Europe; and his activities as educationist, as social religious reformer, and as politician and there you have, judged by quantity alone, the life-work of a Titan".

Tagore transcended the boundaries of his native Bengal and India to plumb new depths around the world. Heavily influenced by Shakespeare, Tagore was the first Asian man to win a Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. In 1950, his song *Jana Gana mana* was named India's national anthem.

He occasionally participated in the Indian nationalist movement and was a devoted friend to Gandhi, the political father of modern India. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915, but resigned shortly after as a protest against British policies in India. He had a role in the cultural renaissance of India and Bengal in the 20th century and was a part of Bengal's most illustrious families. Born in Jorasanko in north Kolkata in 1861, Tagore spent ten years of his life at his family estate in Silaidoh in the Rajshahi district in Bangladesh.

The official 150th Tagore anniversary celebrations opened in Dhaka 6 May and in New Delhi 7 May. A series of programmes, including a special tourist circuit, two joint movie productions and exhibition of paintings will continue throughout the year.

2011

Year of Chemistry

The celebration to commemorate 2011 as the International Year of Chemistry took place at the University of Dhaka on February 14, 2011. Officials, members of the media, students and faculty participated in the launching ceremony, followed by an enthusiastic rally of young students and chemists.

"It's a great honor, a really great honor, to be here and to be a part of this and observe this kind of a program. It's really encouraging," says Waziha Farha, a chemistry student at Dhaka University, whose future aspirations include organic chemistry.

The year 2011 also celebrates the centennial of Madame Marie Curie's receipt of the Nobel Prize for chemistry, in recognition of her work in radioactivity. Madame Curie is one of the first female scientists to achieve worldwide fame, during a time in which women were discouraged from work and scholarship.

"She really inspires me a lot, and she's an idol for us female students," explained Ms. Farha. "She was a woman and had a family, yet she worked for chemistry and that was really hard for her. If she can manage it a hundred years ago, then I can also be able to manage to achieve both."

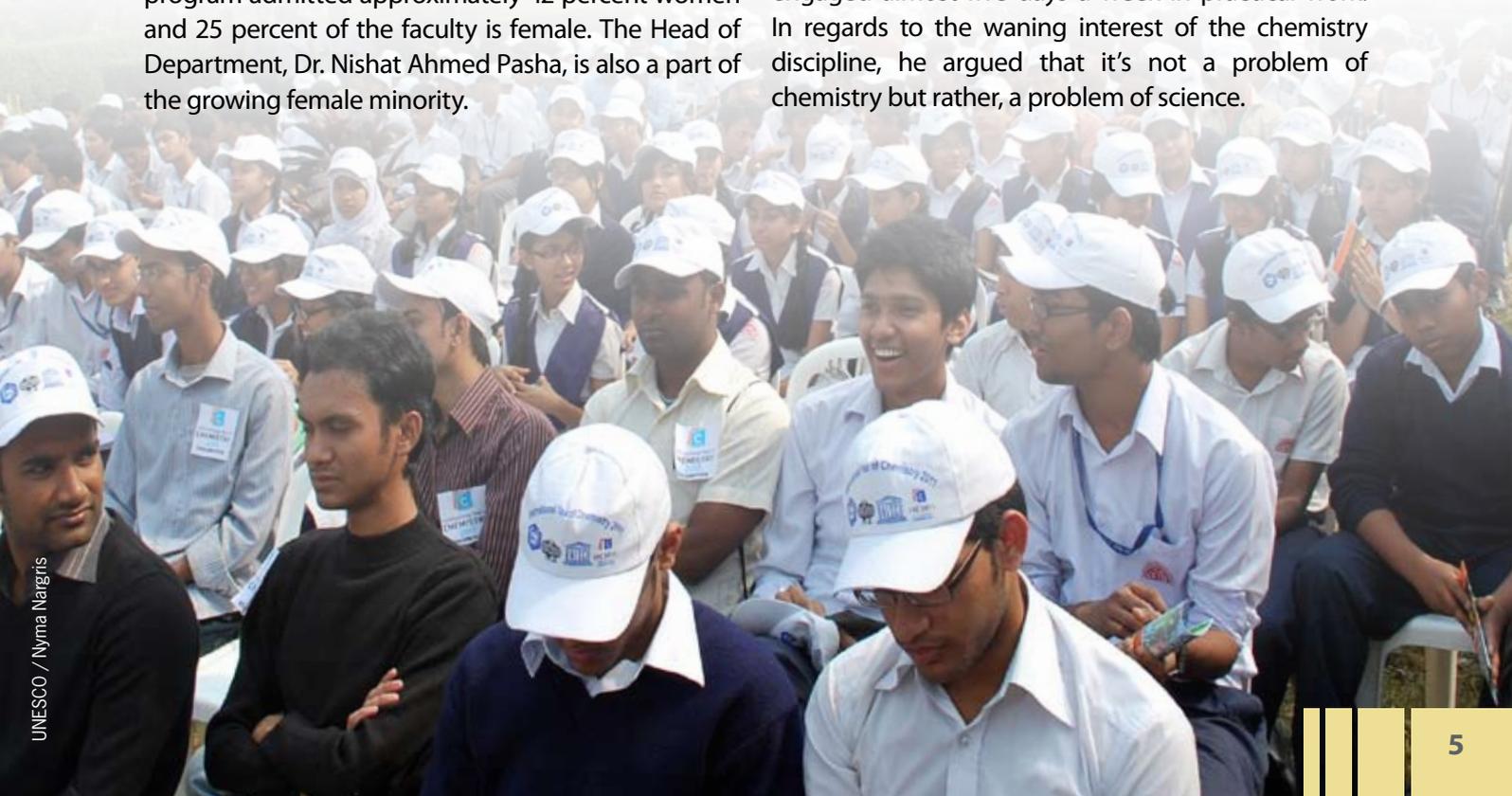
In a field where it is traditionally dominated by men, the Chemistry Department at Dhaka University is gaining a visible female minority. This year, the program admitted approximately 42 percent women and 25 percent of the faculty is female. The Head of Department, Dr. Nishat Ahmed Pasha, is also a part of the growing female minority.

Other concerns felt by students and faculty members is the lack of importance placed on science education, when faced in comparison to other fields of science.

"In Bangladesh, I think the education of science is not very aggressive when compared to the European nations or the States. I think the education system of science should be more pragmatic, more hands on," explained Kollol Roy, a chemistry student at the University of Dhaka.

"Other major subjects such as engineering or medicine, are much more familiar to our society and whenever you ask children, what is your ambition? Obviously, he will first go for engineering or medicine but this also belongs to science and we should promote this, because everything has a scientific character regardless of whether it's engineering or medical science; it is science. So we should focus more on science and research in Bangladesh."

According to Dr. Abdul Jabbar, Associate Professor at the University of Dhaka, chemistry students are engaged almost five days a week in practical work. In regards to the waning interest of the chemistry discipline, he argued that it's not a problem of chemistry but rather, a problem of science.



"In 2002, about 22% of arts and commerce students are admitted at that time and 45% in science," said Dr. Jabbar. "This picture is almost opposite in the year 2009. 42 percent is in commerce and now, 22% is in science. So, it is not the problem of chemistry. People are losing their concern about science, that's a big problem."

UNESCO was declared as the leading UN agency, in partnership with the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), to celebrate the art and science of chemistry throughout the year.

"IUPAC and UNESCO strongly believe that it is time to celebrate the achievements of chemistry and its contributions to the well-being of humankind," said Derek Elias, Head and Representative of UNESCO Dhaka.

The Chief Guest in attendance, Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Education, formally opened the event. He said that the attraction of science education amongst students is reducing, yet this kind of initiative is optimistic to help improve the situation.

It was indeed off to a positive start. An estimated 1,200 students were in attendance, which was several hundred more than anticipated.

"We prepared one thousand caps to hand out," said Dr. Iqbal Rouf Mamun, Associate Professor at the University of Dhaka. "But that wasn't even enough! Finally at the end, we just gave out our own hats because people were asking for them."

The excitement was evident not only amongst students within the chemistry discipline, but in other faculties as well. The key slogan: "Chemistry: our life our future" was splashed across posters and signs along with other positive messages, such as "Know Chemistry For Yourself" and "I Love IYC 2011".

Other year round events to celebrate IYC 2011 includes a science fair or exhibition that may go on

display during April to June 2011; talk shows on radio and television; essay competitions that relate to the theme of IYC 2011; speech competitions in Dhaka; dialogue with government policy makers to gain awareness of IYC 2011; holding seminars at both the local and national level; awarding honor to women who have contributed to chemistry; and finally, the Chemistry Olympiad 2010, which will be dedicated to the IYC 2011.

"As a chemist, today is a glorious day not only for us but for the chemistry discipline. There are lots of students gathered here, lots of people from other departments. Everybody came here just to see what was going to happen. We didn't expect so many people would be here," said Dr. Iqbal Rouf Mamun, Associate Professor at the University of Dhaka.

"So I feel that for our students, especially the ones that have studied chemistry, who thought 'I couldn't be a doctor, I couldn't be an engineer' they will then praise that chemistry is not that poor of a subject.

So we can show through our world event throughout this year that chemistry is a part of real life. Without chemistry, we cannot survive. So this is very much necessary and we are very glad it happened in such a year when UNESCO declared this as the International Year of Chemistry. Without UNESCO, we could not have declared

2011 as International Year of Chemistry. So this is a big part and big role of UNESCO."

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 as the International Year of Chemistry at the 63rd meeting in December 2008 with UNESCO as the leading UN agency with IUPAC as a partner. The Bangladesh Chemical Society, an adhering organization of IUPAC, has formed a strong organizing committee with representatives from different institutions for celebrating IYC 2011 in Bangladesh.



TVET Capacity Strengthening Programme



Photo: courtesy of ILO

UNESCO and the ILO TVET Reform Project joined the Ministry of Education for the inaugural session of the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Capacity Strengthening Programme on 15 March 2011. This launched the first of a series of workshops held between 15 – 19 March as part of the activities of the Programme.

The Capacity Strengthening Programme will be conducted over the next twelve months and will consist of nine workshops and on-the-job exercises to promote employable skills and generate work.

“This remains a priority for a number of countries who are facing challenges in realizing the EFA goals,” said Derek Elias, Head and Representative of UNESCO Dhaka. “In response to the request of the Honourable Minister of Education, UNESCO has appreciated the plan of Bangladesh and agreed to provide policy support in promoting TVET for skills development.”

The development of a national policy for TVET and skills development is a major outcome of the TVET Reform Project. It is a US \$20M project over 5 years funded by the European Commission and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

“The TVET Reform project has capacity development of its stakeholders as an important objective. UNESCO has a similar interest and so it was a natural partner for the project to jointly plan and support the capacity

strengthening initiative. There is the added benefit of two UN agencies cooperating for betterment of the country and being a good example of the one-UN approach in Bangladesh,” explained Arthur Shears, Chief Technical Advisor of the TVET Reform Project. The Ministry of Education, Honourable Minister, Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid MP, formally inaugurated the opening session at Sher-e-Banglanagar, Dhaka. He addressed several key issues such as the Education Policy 2010, which made significant recommendations for accelerated development of the vocational and technical education.

This policy included an increase of competent manpower in various sectors to keep up with national and international demands; a build-up of skilled manpower at a fast pace to create opportunities; and new employment opportunities through export of skilled manpower and to enhance foreign currency earnings. The series of workshops spread over the next twelve months will conclude February 2012.

VOXPOP

June 5th is celebrated around the world as World Environment Day. This year's theme is "Forests: Nature At Your Service". We spoke with several

Dhaka University students who shared with us their concerns for the environment, and what they are doing to make a difference.

In my opinion, we are the main criminal for global warming! In Dhaka, air pollution and sound pollution have become vital problems. Although a number of vehicles are now running by compressed natural gases CNG, which is good for our environment and I think it is a positive approach. Planting trees can save our world which can reduce carbon dioxide. I love my country; it is the most beautiful green country in the world.



Abdullah Al Anid – 23 years old

I conduct my regular activities on the theme REDUCE & RE-USE. I try to avoid processed foods, personal car, drink pure water & try to use biodegradable products. It's not a high enough priority, but our govt. have taken pragmatic steps to make our environment friendly such as ban two stroke wheelers, introduce vehicles run by CNG, expansion of public transport services, restriction on the use of personal cars, modern management technique, and banning plastic products such as poly bags, using water purifier, imposing charge on smoking in open places.



Taslima Chowdhury – 24 years old

Bangladesh is suffering from extreme world climate change, so celebrating World Environment Day is very significant to me. Our teachers encourage us to keep our environment clean and green. I think my country's general awareness on environment and pollution still needs to be increased. Public awareness, reforestation, legislation and implementation of environment friendly policies needs to be done.



Tamanna Azam – 24 years old

Littering on streets is a major issue in our country. I try my best not to litter and had a talk with the household workers and they were also taught to dump garbage in the dustbins and not to throw it outside. The waste water is also being reused, which is a major cause of diarrhea, flu and other diseases. This issue is mostly discussed yet no severe actions are implemented to protect the environment in Dhaka. The Buriganga River, formerly known as the pride of Dhaka, is contaminated by the waste products from industries. Corporate sectors are not aware of these facts and industry owners are not following any regulations. Further violating these rules must lead to imprisonment or fine.



Radwan Noor – 24 years old

UNESCO Dhaka launched two important events highlighting this year's progress for Global Action Week.

The Launching Ceremony of the English Version of the National Education Policy 2010 took place on 27 April, and the Launching Seminar on Sharing the Key Findings of Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2011 followed on 28 April.

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO Dhaka took part in the launching of the National Education Policy. Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Education, graced the event as Chief Guest and Dr. Md. Afsarul Ameen, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education also attended as Special Guest.

Ever since Bangladesh came to independence in 1971, it had not been possible to effectively enforce an Education Policy in the last four decades. Due to political obstacles and other deterrence, several more education policy/reports were prepared yet they also remained unimplemented.

"We now have the long-awaited Education Policy," said Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, in the opening preface of the publication.

"We all know that a right set of principles is essential to achieve some targeted goals. In our Election Manifesto 2008, we set the goal of building up Bangladesh as a poverty-free, non-communal, liberal and democratic state. Without the right kind of directives and guidance, no right programs can be undertaken."

Prior to its final draft, the Education Policy has been through many stages of revision. Different seminars and meetings were held on the draft policy and comments were



“ Unlike conflict-affected communities, humanitarian agencies do not recognize education as ‘life-saving’. Education is the ‘poor neighbor’ in the humanitarian aid system, and receives only 2-percent of funding ”



recorded with contributions coming from educators, students, parents, politicians, and professionals from all walks of life.

“I am pleased to note that Bangladesh has made commendable progress in achieving enrollment and gender parity in primary and secondary education. However, challenges remain,” said Mr. Derek Elias, Head and Representative at UNESCO Dhaka.

“Low internal efficiency such as high dropout rates, poor retention and low quality education have remained major challenges to the education sectors and are of great concern to authorities. The new Education Policy has quite properly addressed the need to revisit teacher training to ensure the training programmes are more realistic and effective, and has also addressed teacher status, rights and responsibilities of teachers for developing educational standards and environment.”

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2011 launching seminar took place at the IDB Bhaban Conference Room on 28 April. This year’s focus was on the hidden crisis in education, with an in-depth analysis on the scale of the crisis, the underlying causes, and setting an agenda for change.

Dr. Md. Afsarul Ameen, MP, Honourable Minister of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education was present as the Chief Guest. Mr. Md Abdul Khaleque, Secretary, Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO, opened the event by presenting the welcome address.

UNESCO publishes the EFA GMR as an annual publication that monitors progress towards a set of targets to which over 160 countries committed themselves to in 2000. Every year, it focuses on a specific theme of particular relevance to achieving the EFA goals.

Mr. M. Habibur Rahman, Director of Education, Save the Children USA, gave a presentation on the key findings of the EFA GMR 2011. According to the report, 21 of the world’s poorest developing countries spend more on military budgets than primary education. The presentation highlighted goals to be achieved and disparities that have hindered progress in the past.

“Unlike conflict-affected communities, humanitarian agencies do not recognize education as ‘life-saving’,” stated Mr. Rahman. “Education is the ‘poor neighbor’ in the humanitarian aid system, and receives only 2-percent of funding.”

EFA Week is observed every year around the world to reaffirm determination for achievement of goals and target set by the international community and the governments during World Education Forum, which was held during April 2000 in Dakar, Senegal. UN Agencies, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, are partners of EFA movement and Dakar Framework of Action.

Dhaka celebrates World Press Freedom Day



Information
and Cultural
Affairs Minister
presenting
awards

UNESCO, in collaboration with the Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communication (BCDJC)

organized the UNESCO
Bangladesh Journalism
Award Ceremony 2011 at
the conference lounge of
National Press Club, Dhaka.

*"21st Century Media: New
Frontiers, New Barriers"* is the
theme of this year's World Press
Freedom Day, celebrated on
3 May from all over the world.

"We may not consciously
exercise our right to know.
However, each time we pick
up a newspaper, turn on
the TV or radio news, or go
on the Internet, the quality
of what we see or hear
depends on the media to
give accurate and up to date
information," said Mr. Derek
Elias, Head and Representative
at UNESCO Dhaka.

"Obstacles in the way of our
right to know may take many

forms, from a lack of resources
and inadequate infrastructure
to deliberate obstruction."

World Press Freedom Day
is an occasion to remember
this right. The idea of World
Press Freedom Day started
20 years ago by a group of
journalists in Windhoek,
Namibia. The Windhoek
Declaration was meant to
advocate for the protection
of freedom of expression,
as mentioned in Article 19
of the Universal Declaration
Human Rights. 20 years
later, the media landscape
has changed beyond
recognition but our collective
objective remains the same:
to promote freedom of
expression as the foundation
for human dignity and the
cornerstone of democracy.

Over the last decade, more
than 500 journalists have
lost their lives in the line
of duty. 60 killings were
reported worldwide in 2010
alone. Every week brings
more reports of journalists
and bloggers suffering from
intimidation and violence
while new threats are rising.

Information and Cultural
Affairs Minister, Abul Kalam
Azad, was present as Chief
Guest and addressed the

importance of investigative
journalism and the significance
of the role the media plays in the
creation of public awareness.

"We believe in freedom for
all information," said Mr. Azad.
"There have been people who
have said that the press is not
free. But I tell you very clearly,
our own Prime Minister, Sheikh
Hasina and what we have
in common, is we believe in
freedom to all information."

Seven journalists from print
and electronic media were
announced as the winners
of Jury's appreciation. The
two winners of the 'UNESCO
Bangladesh Journalism Award
2011' were Mizan Chowdhury,
Senior Reporter at the daily,
Janakantha; and Mashudul
Haque, Special Correspondent
at ATN News. The award
prize was 50,000 taka.

To mark the recognition
of World Press Freedom
Day, awards were given in
recognition of professional, high
quality reporting on the issue
of good governance. This was
also to acknowledge reporting
that has the potential to bring
about constructive change
through increased public
awareness and understanding
of issues focusing on
investigative journalism.



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