

Language And Communication

by A Commentator

THE child of a non-Bengalee family living in Bangladesh will pick up functional knowledge of Bengali if its parents allow it to mingle with the neighbours. Along with learning the language of its family the child will pick up a second language. Why? to communicate with its neighbours and thereby to feel at one with the environment. The child will not remain satisfied communicating with its family which is but a small segment of the larger environment in which the child finds itself. This urge to communicate with those around him is basic to the very nature of man. And language is the most effective means of communicating with the fellow human beings.

Communication between nations is as necessary as it is between individuals in the same society. A child reared up in isolation will grow up as an incomplete man and a people having no link with the rest of mankind will, in course of time, become a nation of dwarfs—intellectually. For it will not be able to learn from the experiences of other nations—experiences of success and failure—there will be no scope to broaden its mental horizon through interchange of ideas.

In this age of science, international communication has assumed a greater importance than ever before. For progress of a society has become almost entirely dependent upon development and application of technology. Without an inflow of technology an as-yet, backward society cannot achieve the desired progress. The economic development of

a country leading to the well being of its people depends upon how far it has been able to harness its resources. This harnessing of resources can be possible only through the application of technology by skilled manpower. Resources can be harnessed by hiring personnel from abroad. But that cannot go on for ever. Since that makes a country dependent upon the technologically advanced countries. And economic sovereignty suffers. Needless to mention, political sovereignty will lose much of its significance if the country continues to be dependent on others for economic reasons. It is in view of this realisation that many a Third World country today is trying to achieve self-sufficiency in technology.

To develop a new set of technologies suited to the given circumstances or even to adopt and adapt foreign technologies a nation has to know what advancement has been made elsewhere in the field of science and technology. In other words, there has to be an inflow of knowledge. This inflow of knowledge is possible only if there is effective communication which again, depends on knowing the language in which the relevant knowledge of science and technology is available. Ironical though, to achieve self-sufficiency in science and technology a country will have to depend, for some time at least, on the language of some technologically advanced country.

Since we already know English because of historical reasons we are at an advantageous position compared with some other Third World countries. There is no branch of

science and technology (or, for that matter no branch of human thought) which has not been developed to the highest level in the English speaking world. A doctor an engineer or a geologist desiring to update his knowledge can easily do so by looking up the latest publications in the respective subject, that have come out in the U.K. or the U.S.A. He can also undertake higher studies abroad taking advantage of his knowledge of the language. Will it then be wise to unlearn this international language that we have already learnt? Our knowledge of English today may not be perfect. But we can hope to improve the standard of English education in course of time. We doubt if because of a falling standard of English in the country, we should stop studying it when other countries will continue to learn it because of the advantages it provides.

None can deny that an increasing number of students today find English a difficult subject. But should we drop English from the syllabus instead of making the learning of it easier by applying modern methods of teaching? The University of Dhaka by dropping English from the list of compulsory subjects for the B.A. (Pass) course has offered us an issue which deserves dispassionate discussion from all angles. The immediate effect of the decision will be: students will find it easier to pass the examination. But it can be pointed out that there are other ways to make more students pass the examination even retaining English as a compulsory subject. One way

to effect it would be to revise the syllabus change the system of examination and method of teaching. The grounding in English is done in school. And it is here that something has gone wrong. Instead of removing English from the college syllabus the authorities had better make concerted efforts to ensure that students coming out of school after seven years of compulsory learning of English do not remain weak in basic English. It is not an impossible task we believe. Till such time as the standard of English education cannot be upgraded right from the school level up to the degree level let the syllabus for degree level English be easy enough to avoid massive failure in the subject.

Many believe if English be treated as a foreign language, instead of as a literature, students will not find it as difficult to learn it as they find it now. We need not teach our children English so that they can appreciate Shakespeare. But we have to teach them English so that they can communicate with the world.

Our graduates must be enabled to conduct business correspondence with foreign countries, exchange ideas with foreigner colleagues in the same profession and effectively participate in international conferences at home and abroad and read and understand journals of international repute that convey ideas and analyse world situation and carry information usually not available elsewhere. And students at the university level must be enabled to add to their knowledge by reading books that have not been translated into our language.