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English seen as means for uplift

Sports Reporter

A national seminar on "Status and importance of English in Bangladesh" has brought into sharp focus the pressing need for upgrading the status of the language from the periphery to the centre of the country's educational and other needs.

The seminar, organised jointly by Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA) and Bangladesh Language Society (BLS), has come out with a set of recommendations to reach a national consensus regarding the status of English in the curriculums.

Terming English as a window to the outside world, the participants felt that the country could no longer afford to keep this window closed to "satisfy the ego of a few shortsighted people."

They noted that there were of late encouraging signs both from official and non-official quarters that something should be done to check the fast deteriorating standards of English in the country.

They felt that without English, the country would not be able to make much headway in this highly competitive world of science and technology, trade and commerce, regional and international relations and communications.

The participants noted some specific needs for learning English. Such needs, having bearing on the national development activities, include:

higher and professional studies both inside and outside the country, international communication, job opportunities both in and outside the country and inter-cultural understanding and exchanges, they observed.

The emerging consensus through extensive deliberations in the seminar was that different programmes should be strengthened and upgraded to

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facilitate teaching English in Bangladesh. The programmes in this connection should be an integrated one, covering teaching materials, teacher's training, staffing, English at graduate and post-graduate levels, test and evaluation and English teaching centre.

The participants observed that sustained efforts were necessary to enable the larger number of people to read and understand English books and journals at the higher stages of education.

They pointed out that Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission in its report a decade and a half back had also suggested that English "has to be learnt as a medium of exchange of ideas, and modern and scientific methods for its teaching must be introduced."

They pointed out that even traditionally and inward looking, Chinese and Japanese started now learning English on an extensive scale because of their realisation about its indispensability and importance in the modern world of science and technology.

It was stressed in the seminar that the approach towards teaching and learning of English in the new perspective of using Bangla at all levels of national activities should be different from before and specific to the needs of the country in tune with the modern techniques and strategies of learning as a foreign language.