

Readers' Forum

SAVE ENGLISH

Through the columns of your esteemed daily (New Nation Diary of April 19, 1988) you informed your readers about the birth of an Association named "The English Association of Bangladesh" which brought out a book entitled "The state of English in Bangladesh Today". If I remember correctly, earlier in a port editorial column, you presented us with 'English is being un-Englished'. Prior to these and after, you have been alerting the nation about the deteriorating situation in this respect.

We quite often blame our boys for the un-Englishing. But I would say that it is some of our teachers, with honourable exceptions, who are responsible for the present state of affairs. We do not have an adequate number of English-trained teachers in the country. The first vacuum was created as a result of the partition of India. But the impact of the vacuum was not that wide. The situation went from bad to worse in the seventies and today the position of English has come to something like "Latin" to us. There is utter confusion and delay in disposal of matters in Govt offices, organisations, institutions, Courts of Justice, etc.

We were lagging behind for more than 200 years because of the preaching of the fundamentalists and thereafter by other elements of the sub-continent. Sir Syed Ahmed, Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque and Suhrawardy along with thoughtful educationists and personalities played their role in educating the Muslims, particularly in English. The Muslims of the sub-continent not only learnt English but learnt many other foreign languages.

Some time ago, after English was declared an optional subject for degree classes, I suggested to the Chairman of a Department (not English) of the Dhaka University that they were trying to create two classes. Those who have wealth more than their requirement will send their wards to foreign countries for education and others will continue to remain illiterate. The Professor shrugged his

shoulders. My talk with the Chairman of the English Department on the subject was casual and inconclusive.

We fought for our mother tongue. We have not only achieved the desired object but liberated Bangladesh with Bangla as state language. It is for the relevant quarters now to develop the Bangla language and introduce Bangla at all levels. But we should do it in a phased programme. Our teaching is, Go to far off China to acquire knowledge. Through English we can communicate with most of the countries of the world. Already the pace of work in Govt. offices and organisations has slowed down to a great extent. One has to consult dictionaries—English to Bangla, Bangla to English, Paribhasha, etcetera. In many cases, letters are dictated by bosses in English and those are translated in Bangla. Letter written in English to Govt offices by business houses on matters of international trade are often not accepted by over zealous governmental organisations. I enquired from the Bangla Academy about the Bangla version of "Academy". I was told 'Academy' is 'Academy'!

We are not quite clear about the national policy. Has English been made a compulsory second-language subject at all levels? I do not remember to have seen any announcement from the competent authority in this behalf. There is a paramount need of asking the authority about the urgency of educating our boys in English properly so that they can keep pace with developed countries in the matter of science, technology and the computer-era.

I could not get hold of a copy of "The State of English in Bangladesh Today" nor could I locate "The English Association of Bangladesh" because of my old age handicaps. I would request the Association, like-minded people, intellectuals, scientists, technocrats, teachers and lawyers to consider all aspects of the matter dispassionately and save English from molestation.

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