

The New Nation

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English in B.A. classes

THE Chittagong Universities have, according to a newspaper report, taken a decision to reintroduce English as a compulsory subject in B. A. (pass) course. The decision will take effect from the next academic year. Compulsory English will cover 300 marks. But this will not apply to students of Commerce and Science groups. Four years ago English as a compulsory subject in B. A. (pass) course was dropped.

By deciding to reintroduce English the Chittagong University authorities have only reflected the prevailing public opinion. Different quarters have begun to feel that it is dangerous to downgrade English in our academia, particularly as far as students of Arts and Humanities are concerned. In fact the nation has had to pay dearly for the neglect of English in the past years. Standard have fallen and, as the University authorities have observed, the horizon of knowledge of the student has shrunken. Our students were also disadvantaged in foreign universities and in employment market abroad. And at a time when countries and nations which were outside the ambit of English education are showing a new zeal in learning the language, this country was

taking a leap backward. To say the least, it was a senseless thing to waste the advantage from English education which we had once laboriously acquired. Learning of the English language was never in question in India or Sri Lanka after they became independent. In today's shrinking and interdependent world one can follow isolationist policies only at one's own peril; and this applies equally to linguistic isolationism.

It is never too late to rectify a mistake. The Chittagong University authorities would deserve commendation for taking a timely decision. Their action is nothing innovative or venturesome. It signifies only a return to status quo. Yet, there will be problems. The percentage of pass had gone up after English as a compulsory subject was omitted. High failure rate is apprehended after restoration of English in the curriculum, since most students find English a big hurdle. Everyone would want that failure rate should be contained but not by compromising the standard. This means that university authorities and teachers have more to do than just reincluding English in the syllabus.

Commonly students dread English instead of finding interest in it. Even those who pass in the subject try to learn it mechanically or as some kind of drudgery remaining ever a stranger to the savour and interest of the English language and

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literature. This is a monumental failure of the method of teaching. Literature is always an interesting subject for those able to enjoy it. Interest of the students should be so kindled that they do not merely pass the English test but learn the language to a reasonable degree and also be able to glean, even cursorily, some of its literary treasures. This cannot be done suddenly after a student enters graduation class. Students make too much effort to pass the English test and learn too little of the language. The error lies in the way students begin to learn it. The methods of teaching a language are being modernised. Our students depend on note books. Our teachers are used to the old method of teaching with its inordinate emphasis on grammar. It is good that the authorities are waking up to the reality but a change in the approach to the teaching of English has become necessary. It is hoped that a rethinking will be done and a serious effort will be made at all levels to raise the standard of English in schools and colleges.