



Editorial

The New Nation

MONDAY 23 JANUARY 1989

23 Save English

SOME quarters are feeling perturbed, rightly, over the state of English in the country. The consequence of neglecting English for years is now being realised with trepidation. The standard of English in the academies has been falling steeply over the last few years and some extreme examples of this deterioration would appear like literary atrocities.

One does not have to be an anglophile to realise the folly of this course. The English language is being studied and cultivated by peoples who have none of the historical and other links with the language that in our case helped so greatly in the promotion of educational and intellectual aims. Change in the system of education has been effected from time to time as that was both necessary and desirable. After liberation it would have been reaso-

nable to expect that the standard of English would rise and not decline, especially since students were no longer burdened with Urdu as a compulsory subject. And it is further expected of an independent country to carefully set its educational priorities in the context of the needs of the present, highly competitive world. But as a people we are prone to be led away by emotionalism. Not only was English neglected but some elements appeared to find justification for this neglect in terms of nationalism as they understood the concept. Consciously or unconsciously English was thought to represent a competing claim against Bangla and after Urdu was justly removed from the educational scene, some felt it necessary to erect another strawman against which to fight for the glorification of Bangla. This was hardly necessary. To point out the errors in their thinking is not to belittle their linguistic fervour which no doubt emanates from the loftiest fount of idealism and love of country. Urdu was imposed on us but English we had chosen to learn voluntarily and we even regretted

for being late starters in this regard in the nineteenth century.

All is not lost, we would say. The popular awareness on the subject is timely. Some citizens have formed a body to save English. And in this context we regard the government's move to start this teaching of English two years earlier in school as a well-considered one. What is important, however, is not how many years a student has learnt English but how seriously and by what methodology he has learnt it. English was also made a casualty of ineptitude and apathy of teachers and text book writers.

It should be remembered that the renewed emphasis on English is only going back to the status quo ante some time in the mid-seventies; it is not a new burden on students but only a way to stop the process of unlearning a language which the nation had once learnt to great advantage