

## THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

DHAKA WEDNESDAY AUGUST 9 1989

### Revival Of English

We return to an old subject and that for new reasons. The subject is English, speaking generally, and written English in particular. And the reasons are that writing ability has markedly declined over the years. Certainly this has come, intelligibly, in the wake of a general decline in education standards, but the other factors equally to blame are; an unreasoned apathy politically spawned to a foreign language in the post-independence years, which seems to be still of at work; and this has consciously or subconsciously made both teachers and students of English take it lightly. Some even seem to have gone so far as to abjure the moral responsibility to take their task of teaching or learning English seriously by arguing that by doing so they are committing no offence from the point of professional ethics (for the teachers) nor doing any harm to themselves or to the nation (for both students and teachers), because English is a foreign language and must thus grate on national pride should in not be treated as such.

That these perceptions are thoroughly wrong is being proved by experience and circumstances everyday. The price being paid for putting English into limbo is already proving pretty high. For instance, our students find it hard pursuing courses of study abroad. Most also fail tests held for admission to higher courses of study. Such predicaments are mostly the result of poor performance in English.

Among the new reasons are also such contemporary instances as point to the seriousness with which most of the developed and developing world have taken to English. Even British parents are, according to a comment in the London Times, asking for "the linguistic competence of their offspring in their native or adopted language". The need for "remedial classes" is recognised even by the Oxford University circle. The emphasis is on the writing ability of students of arts or social science.

How and why countries like India, Japan and China, among other Asian countries, or those in Europe, have returned to English is common knowledge. Judged in the light of such examples, the intellectual fate and career of a whole generation in this country is at stake.

The decline in English, specially written English, is now an object of universal lamentation in the country. The most sensitively vocal section is those of the old guard. With them will certainly go much of English and the interest in it.

Though the mischief has been done, it is never too late to mend. The reform or remedy should start right from the primary through the secondary and post-secondary stages. Two things are a must, to begin with: first, work to resuscitate English should start under a policy formulated exclusively on the revival of English, followed by a plan to work out the details by means of a curriculum recast to this end. (The thrust of the curriculum) should be on the written efficiency of a student whatever his subject-arts or science-in English.