

The importance of English

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The intensive endeavour being made in the most developed countries of the West to improve still further the present level of science and technology

Those developed countries are making facilities and financial assistance available to scholars and researcher generously. They are offering scholarship and job opportunities to students from Asian African and South American countries. English being the medium of their education and research, students from even non-English speaking countries where English is given due importance and is taught in their schools, colleges and universities as a second language, quickly become capable of participating in the research in those developed countries without much language problem. Thus the developed countries have established so many highly powerful education and research centres in hundreds of subjects in their countries that research findings are coming out in the market in the form of books or as articles in Journals with newer ideas and technologies on hundreds of subjects. The higher class students in the non-English speaking countries where English is taught as a second language with care can benefit from those books and journals directly as soon as they are published and are available in the market. But the students of those countries which have never taught or have discarded English from the curricula need to wait for someone to translate those books and journals in their own vernaculars for them. The result of the latter policy is just like erection of a high wall between their students and the main flow-line of knowledge. This is going to happen in our country. It should be critically, carefully and thoroughly examined by our experts on education in general and particularly by those who have been entrusted with the task of formulating the education policy for the country. Forcing our students to learn Bangla terminology instead of internationally accepted English terminology is another hurdle on the way of their consulting English reference books and in going higher studies in the developed countries.

For historical reason, English is widely spoken and read in all the continents and has its influence on regions where it is even not the principal spoken language. English is second to only Chinese in respect of the number of people who speak it. At the same time English is either the native or official language of the people living in one-fifth area of the earth's land surface.

Although the International Tele-communication Union has accepted three more languages (French Spanish and Russian) in addition to English, virtually, it is English which has occupied the supreme position in the communication field of the world.

The world has over 3,000 languages, but English is the most growing and influential language of all of them. At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, English was the native language of barely 15 million people, now the number is 320 million. More than half of the world's scientific technical journals and newspapers are printed in English alone. Three-fourths of the world's news are written in English. Over 80 percent of its literature is in English. English is the language of science and technology. It is the language of computers and computers are the language of the world.

variegated and expressive vocabulary of 50,000 words, more than three times its nearest competitors.

In the field of trade and commerce, communication between parties of even non-English speaking countries of Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe is almost exclusively transmitted in English; because English is common to all of them as second language.

The people of Soviet Union, who are self-sufficient in art, culture, industry, trade and commerce and science and technology, learn English as their principal second language. The rich Japanese who are very proud of their culture start studying English from Level Seven. Further, there has been a mushroom growth of private English language schools in all the cities and towns of Japan.

Our nearest neighbouring country India, which is unquestionably much ahead of us in many areas, has still retained English in its schools, colleges and universities. India, after independence declared Hindi as its first national language but in the same rule it was provided that English would continue as an official language until 1965. And again in 1967 by the English Language Amendment Bill, English was proclaimed as an alternative or as an Associate Language with Hindi.

In the answer to the question, as to why business of SAARC, an organisation comprising our nearest neighbouring countries has to be processessed in English, is critically examined in the context of our younger generation's attitude towards English, it will not take much time to get a sense of direction in this respect for our nation.

The selection of English as the only medium of SAARC is not a whim. Every SAARC country speaks a language different from the others. So all the member countries had to look for a language which is understood by the representatives of each country and it does not take a long time to find that the required language is English. These circumstances prevail in all the international forums for which English is accepted as the principal medium of communication.

Since its inception our present education system has been an English-oriented one. Our present education system was founded by the British. In the meantime, through this system, we have had a good number of educated people in our society; many of whom are highly qualified persons. They have been educated in English influenced medium along with Bangla. Many of them are specialists in their respective disciplines. They are quite competent in assimilating materials of our interest from English books and journals either on general or on technical subjects which are published in large numbers and on hundreds of subjects. Our scholars are capable of preparing reading materials taking help from those materials, for our young students. So we have reasons to be proud that we need not bring any English speaking teachers even for our highest educational institutions. But, God forbid, if

batches of teachers are retired in due course, the day is imminent when we will have few teachers of science and technology. This means that our present education policy is a perverted one and is gradually taking the nation backward. This policy is bound to eripple the nation in the long run, unless it is revised.

We can guess that within a period of about two decades or so the present day technologies will be replaced by even newer ones and this process of change will continue. Unless our present higher educated students have good command of the English language we cannot expect our nation to keep pace with the fast pace of development of science and technology.

The recently adopted policy that all the office work of our country will be done only in Bangla does spell out the pertinent question how to effect an overnight shifting from English to Bangla. Even nothing is said about learning English upon which our present education system was founded and developed through a century. Traditionally, the general aim of our students going to educational institutions is to get into the Government service. When they come to know that office work will be done in Bangla, they normally find little reason to study English unless they are briefed about the other reasons for studying English.

In view of the wrong policy of the Government, many of our younger generation have been ignoring English since 1971. During this period they have completed their academic career without learning much. Most of them are now unable to understand the contents of reference books, magazines and journals written in English. Thus their knowledge is very limited although they have obtained the highest degree from our university. In pursuing our prescribed education policy, the majority of our students learnt only Bangla terminology. When these students go to study Medicine or Engineering science they need to follow books in English which

become very difficult for them to understand. Again, when they are sent out to developed countries for higher studies they fail to follow their classes which are conducted only in English. As a result many of them are returning to the country without completing their course of M.S. or Ph.D. etc.

Bangla Academy has been entrusted with the task of translating the essential text-books for higher classes into Bangla. While the attempt looks to be a very encouraging one in the field of education, the following relevant points should have been foreseen, before any further harm is done to our student community, particularly by those who are at the helm of educational affairs of the country:

1. Translated texts cannot always be exactly the same as original.
2. How many books of how many writers can be translated by us out of millions on hundreds of subjects?
3. Do we have enough competent translators available to do this job who would be ready to leave their present occupation and take up this job?
4. It is alleged that most of our learned scholars and teachers are less interested in undertaking translation as a profession.
5. Translation performance under government contract cannot be satisfactory.
6. By the time the translated books will be finally available on any subject more updated books by new writers will come to the market and the translated books will be obsolete.
7. The number of buyers of those books are limited.
8. Due to poor market size the publication of books in Bangla for higher education is not commercially viable.

The innocent students community should not be given a false hope. If Bangla Academy is not sure that they can meet the requirement of books for appropriate education required by our student community in competition with our neighbouring countries at least in all disciplines, they should be enough to make it clear to nation.