

Improving The Teaching Of English

Many people tend to imagine that the recent government decision to re-instate English as a compulsory subject at the degree level will lead to an immediate improvement in the situation created by decades of neglect. Far from it. There exists today an acute dearth of English teachers at all levels, a numerical dearth made worse by the unpalatable fact that many of those with degrees in English who serve on college staffs are not equal to the work expected from them. Students report that little is taught in the class-room; teachers content themselves with a few superficial lectures on grammar, style and diction, but seldom venture into intensive exegesis of texts. The result even in those institutions where there is provision for the study of English even today is that students acquire no reasonably satisfactory knowledge of the language after two years' work.

This obviously has to change. If the government is sincere in its determination to repair the damage caused by the removal of English from degree syllabuses, a comprehensive effort needs to be launched to re-train teachers. In-service training on a regular basis round the year for different batches of teachers is so urgent a necessity that without it, the reintroduction of compulsory English will be a futile exercise.

We believe also that having regard to the scarcity of Bangladeshi scholars who can be relied upon for employment in in-service courses, money should be found for the hiring of native speakers from Britain and the USA. This will cost a pretty penny, but we think the reform that has been announced will largely fail if we try to economise on this count.

But it is reasonable to expect that some free cooperation may be obtainable from the US Information Service and the British Council. The Asia Foundation may also be prepared to help.

If a group of Bangladeshi teachers could be trained intensively, they in their turn could fan out into the outlying areas and spread the knowledge they have acquired.

A parallel effort in the preparation of text-books at all levels is also called for. The set of books which the Text-Book Board has been imposing on our boys and girls for years, has to be jettisoned. They abound in grammatical and idiomatic errors which in most cases undo the work of good teaching.

One hopes that the committee set up by the government in this matter will come up with sensible proposals.