=Magazine =

OXBURY, Connecticut - Despite everything, I believe we are at a point in human history when the concept of free speech has finally penetrated more people than ever before; at a minimum the freedom to speak and publish has become an issue where it never was before. This is one of the most hopeful social developments in many hundreds of years.

Now for the bad news: At the very hour of immense victories for the sciences - the victory, after all, of reason reason as a guiding force in human society has lost much of its credibility, perhaps most es-

pecially among artists and

intellectuals. For while men were walking on the moon, innocent men, women and children were being shot down in San Salvador. South Africa, Vietnam, Russia, Chile, Turkey, China, Argentina

and hundreds of other places. When it is impossible to find enough food or shelter for people, there is a certain dark logic in beating back their demands for the means of existence.

But when it is definitely possible to feed and shelter everyone and still the carnage goes on, even more mercilessly, against millions of people and their needs, the irony is terrible, and the mind — as frequently happens now — senses the overthrow of reason, a defeat that the vaulting progress of science and technology has only compounded.

It is a defeat which has clearly affected the arts in our time and encouraged the dark pessimism that hangs over them and the strain of violent escapism that runs through them, especially popular films.

before, reason as a guiding force in human society has lost much of its credibility. television, and music.

Before the Age of Reason there was the Age of Faith. Now we have the Age of the Fanatic.

This would almost be funny if it weren't so tragic. For with the disgrace of reason the very notion of morality is confounded too; whatever else morality is, it reflects a highly rational construct of life: if you do evil you must be punished and not rewarded.

What could be more reason-

And what could be less likely in this century, which counts in the millions the children and the helpless aged who have died by senseless violence, the original political impetus of which is in the end no longer definable, lost in a tangle of flesh and cinders it has left behind.

The marvelous inspirations of political geniuses have probably destroyed more wealth and killed more people than any other cause.

But people are rarely moved by facts the way they are by myths and appeals to the imagination. With the possible exception of works of art, there is no phenomenon more mysterious than the power of political leadership.

When I entered college in 1934, the black shadow of Adolph Hitler was looming over the world. Fascism was entertaining the Germans as it al-

ready had the Italians, putting everyone in wonderful uniforms and parading millions of people around in enormous public squares, and throwing malcon-

Renowned US author and playwright Arthur Miller writes in this exclusive column for Inter

Press Service that while the concept of free speech has penetrated more people than ever

tents into camps. Meanwhile, the surrounding democratic states - England and France especially - were so dispirited and weakened by years of economic depression that they were themselves prey to their own domestic entertain-

As long as the depression lengthened out over the years with less and less hope that the government could ever find a solution. I was afraid that the American public would be misled by its own brand of fascism. And so the function of the arts as a means of alerting the people came very naturally, for the American press was 90 per cent rightist.

Indeed the largest single radio audience, some 15 million people or more, were avid listeners to Father Charles Coughlin, who was adapting the speeches of Joseph Goebbels. Hitler's Minister of Propaganda.

In the end he was only reading them, as blatantly antisemitic and anti-democratic as they were, and millions were his passionate followers.

is the triumph of the anti-ratio-American society was and is

(and therefore also correct)

will very often depend on

If you want to write to us

with any questions you

have, simple or complicated,

please write to The

Language Lab, c/o The

Daily Star.

who you are writing for.

But the point is that Fascism

the most ethnically mixed in the world, yet our fascists were often calling for anti-foreign measures, exalting something called "the people", meaning "white Americans", and praising American racial purity, a paradise which excluded Jews and

of course Afro-Americans. One of the reasons why democracy has turned out to be a much harder taskmaster than dictatorship is that it attempts to combine a freedom to feel with an objective respect for law and the rights of others.

The authoritarian sin — if you will excuse that archaic word — is that it prescribes how we must feel, and teaches us to obey rather than to make choices between good and evil.

These are simple ideas to be sure but nevertheless difficult to hold on to, and once they are let go there is nothing left but the strong against the weak.

Certain elements of authoritarianism had and still have their draw in the democratic

Its main attraction, I think, is its promise of deliverance, a kind of passionate messianic deliverance from the labors of reason, and its rise in a society is always accompanied by the desire to censor alternative viewpoints out of existence.

The real crime of authoritarianism of the Left or the Right is

The Age of the Fanatic that it attempts to keep people children forever. We need only look at the former Yugoslavia

for the consequences. The Serbs, who in World War were the most valiant in stopping Hitler in the Balkans. have been seized by a fanatical ethnic nationalism which has blinded first an unprincipled set of leaders, many of them excommunists playing their last card, and then a large part of the population — a nationalism which allows no opposing viewpoint into their controlled press.

The result is that they now stand amazed, genuinely, I'm sure, to learn that the world outside Serbia looks upon them as villains.

The superficial issue of the 1990s is often sexual, but it is significant that the much publicized attack on the sexually explicit photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe was launched and managed by the far Right, not the center and not the Left.

When precisely the same consequences result from a fear of political dissidence and sex, we have to suspect that sex and political dissidence have something in common. It is alienation, the first sin.

And in this century what censorship has so often prepared us for is not just limitations on what we may see or hear but one or another form of Fascism, the total control of human beings by government.

Arthur Miller is a four-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his plays Death of a Salesman. All My Sons. The Price and After the Fall. This year, he was among 13 awarded the National Medal of Arts in the United States.

Confused 'Deshi'

Continued from page 10 their hardest to preserve vestiges of Bengali culture in lives so dominated by the prevalent Western culture in the media. television, in the music we listened to, the movies we watched, and the actors/actress we idolized. Even the politicians, writers and philosophers we were made familiar with and told to emulate were, apart from a few like Mahatma Gandhi, Western. In fact, the ideas of

the great Mahatma were taught

to us from a Western point of

So, it was with a mind very much dominated by pop culture that I started my education in the States. But pretty soon, I discovered the Bengali in me. I realised first of all, that I was not white, and no matter how heavy my American accent was, I'd never be considered anything but a foreigner in the so-called "melting pot" of the world. I also realised that I loved my food, that I needed a regular dose of Bengali meals; that I missed talking in Bangla, however, much of it had been 'Banglish' (Bangla and English) the lingua franca of all most all BBCD's even some LDCD's (lived in Dhaka, but willfully confused deshis), that I took offense everytime a heavily accented Indian immigrant was portrayed as the butt of slap stick humor on screen. I realised that my Bengali roots were much too strong to be ignored. Roots. The roots that made me proud of the richness of my heritage, of my people. It was in my all American liberal institution that

1 discovered Tarashankar

Bandhapadya, Mahasweta Devi and Hasan Azizul Haque. discovered them in translated works by others, but that is the tragedy of being a BBCD. discovered the words of my people in the tongue of another people. Even better, one BBCD friend of mine learned to read and write Bangla when she went to Cornell. It was in America that I discovered, how exhausting trying to explain things like bharta, or why I addressed very Bengali who called my dorm room as uncle or aunty, could be. And the words gaanjam or patta or chhaakh. How do you translate

their true slangular meanings? Equally intrinsic in me though, are the love of blue jeans and a big juicy hamburger: liberal ideas of the emancipation of all women, the belief in equal rights in spite of class and creed, in the inherent right of man and woman to

them into English and not lose

have the right to choose, to speak their minds, to vote: the love of the sun and sand, the belief that to hang out is one's human right, and the absolute conviction that God is a man!

I suppose that in many ways BBCD's are lucky. After all, we have the privilege of being able to take the best of both world's. to see the world, to mix with a melange of people, most of us even speak more than two languages. And yet, one person's best is another person's worst. Who is to decide, what is the best of both world's? According to politicians today, we are entering a new age where the world is becoming smaller, where people are moving toward becoming one single human race. Hahl One, indeed.

Are you a BBCD? Do you know what I'm talking about? Any ideas on ending this confusion? What is our future? We could form an organization, you know a support group or something (again, the American in me) but where would this organization be situated? Go figure... I'm still trying to find my-

Across the Mid-night

by Akhtar Ahmad

Across the mid-night Along with my soul The wonderful owl Begins to chant The duet song. Ultimately a chorus Along with bands And hexaphone. Then, I become the lead singer And the owl a listener.

The British Council Language Matters

The Intro

Today's column has many of our regular features. There is another Writing Pad and Language Lab, and also the next in our series of articles on language learning and teaching in Bangladesh. Inaddition there is another vocabulary game of jumbled words.

The Language Lab

In this column we want you to write to us about any little problems that you have with English and we will see if we can 'analyse' them. We will try to give the best answer possible in the space available.

Today's question has some relevance to questions that have been raised before in this column.

One reader has asked

Is it correct English to say 'My name's John'?

In other words, is it 'correct' to have a contraction ('s instead of is),

Well it is certainly correct to say this. Indeed, it would be very strange to say 'My name is John' unless you wanted to emphasise the word 'is'. And

Where are

the

Andes!

The Word Processor......

you would only do this if you wished to contradict (or possibly correct) another speaker.

As we have pointed out before, there will be a series of articles at a later date which discuss the issue of the spoken language. But it is the lack of features such as contractions that sometimes clearly distinguish someone as a non-native speaker.

It is quite another question though whether it is acceptable to write a contraction. Here the answer is perhaps more complex. It refers also to some of the issues discussed last week in this column.

In certain contexts it is certainly correct to write contractions.

For example, if you are writing speech and using inverted commas ("), it is quite normal to imitate basic features of the spoken language such as contractions. You would not use them though if you were writing a formal report.

In letter writing one key difference between formal and informal letters is the use of contractions in the latter.

We come back therefore once again to one of the issues raised last week: your audience. What is appropriate

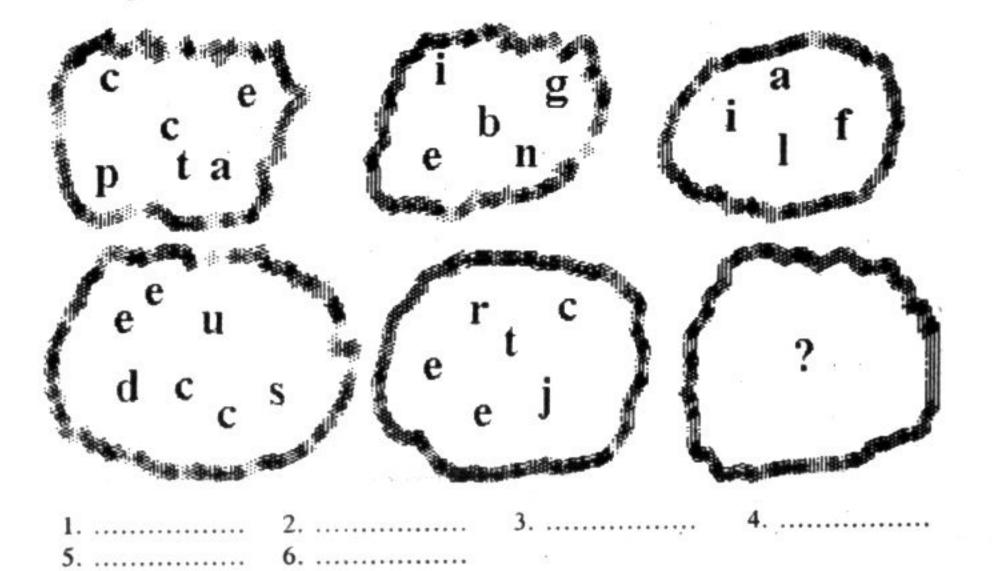
On the

ends of your

armies!

Wobbly Words

Try this word puzzle. In each shape the letters are jumbled up. Put them in the correct order. What is missing?



Where has all the **English Gone?**

Having established what the role of English in Bangladesh should be, we return this week to the question often put to us, "Do you think our young students have the opportunity of successfully acquiring English?" In fact this question was recently answered by the headmaster of a large non-government high school in Dhaka. "Our students this year have done well in their SSC examination, but still we have a problem," he said. "Their English isn't good enough. They simply can't use it." He was talking about students that had been taught English for eight years.

An Englishman, working here in Bangladesh, had said something rather similar only a few days before. "I interview many university graduates with excellent examination results and yet their English is practically non-existent. They find it hard to answer even the simplest question." These are students who have received at least ten years of English teaching, maybe more. But what, one is forced to ask, have they actually learnt?

Whatever English these students may, or may not, have learnt, it doesn't seem to have proved of practical use. This seems to be the crux of the problem, and to many people it does seem an unfortunate waste. How can people be taught English for so long and yet not be able to use it? The key word here is 'use', for, of course, something has definitely been learnt. For example, these students must have acquired skill in passing examinations, and in many cases, very well. But isn't there a contradiction here? How can students do

very well in an examination, which (at SSC and HSC levels) includes English as a compulsory subject, without being able to listen to, speak, read or write English with any satisfactory degree of proficiency? Isn't something wrong?

There have been many editorials, articles and letters in newspapers that have pointed a finger at the public examination system, but does the fault lie there? And, if so, where exactly? Quite recently, another headmaster, this time of an exceptionally good government high school, allowed one visitor to see a class of 10 students taking their trial SSC examination. It was an impressive sight. Neat rows of scholarly heads concentrated on their Bangla examination in spacious, well lit, colourfully decorated classrooms. It was reminiscent of visits to some considerably less wellendowed institutions during the actual SSC examination itself some years before. In spite of the less spacious, well lit and decorated classrooms, the sight of that silent, concentrated effort had left a lasting impression.

Back in the headmaster's study at the government high school, another aspect of these examinations was however, brought to light. "Our students got very good marks in the SSC examination this year," the headmaster said. "But the guardians are never satisfied. They want better and better marks. The trouble is, they only think of the marks. They are not interested in knowledge." These are revealing remarks. That guardians should want their sons and daughters to do better and better is only natural, though there are dangers in that, of course. Students can be pushed too hard; in particularly ruthless cases, even over the edge. Nevertheless, what parent can resist taking pride in their children's achievements?

According to the headmaster however, the term 'achievement' has lost its original connotation and no longer signifies the accumulation of knowledge, but only of marks. The focus of attention, the headmaster seems to be saying, is not on what is examined, but on a purely statistical end result. The mark, embodied in a certificate, has become an end in itself. So we have education in pursuit of a piece of paper, not in pursuit of knowledge. Yet aren't marks supposed to have some significance and validity? Can they be totally divorced from what is being examined?

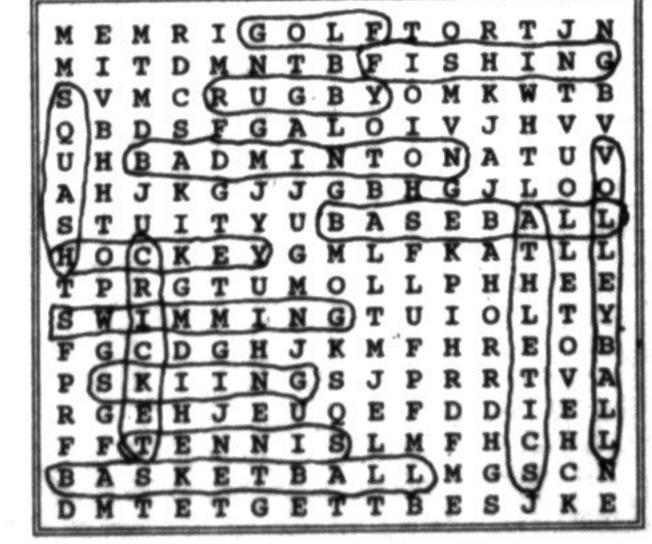
Until recently, there was a more obvious correlation between students' actual proficiency in the English language and their poor SSC examination result, with an average failure of almost 70%, mostly due to low marks in English. Then, to everyone's surprise, the percentage of students passing the SSC examination soared to 60% and above. Could there be any truth in the assertion that this significant improvement was connected with the introduction of new, objective type questions?

Multiple-choice objective questions were not actually introduced until 1992, when, in English, 50% of total marks were allocated to them. The actual questions used, however, both in the 1992 and 1993 SSC examinations, were taken from a book of 500 sample multiple-choice questions on every subject. This book was made available to both teachers and students in order to familiarize them with the new type of question long before the examinations were held, and, immediately afterwards, answers to these questions were also made freely available in the market. Thus students were given an open sesame to better and better marks.

In the next article we would like to start looking at equally, if not more, important. An analysis of the actual questions being asked in the English examinations will, perhaps, provide further crucial clues as to why our young students may be finding it difficult to acquire English successfully.

WORDSQUARE

Here is the answer to last week's sports wordsquare.



The Writing Pad

Today we would like to take a quick look at introductory expressions.

By this we do not mean linking words and expressions (because, therefore etc.) but the expressions which lead into certain key parts of your letter. One example we pointed out recently was for requests: 'I would be grateful if you could....'.

Look at this example but also look back at the example letters in previous weeks.

Dear Mrs Chatterley

I am writing to you with regard to your recent application for a post with our organisation.

regret to inform you that your application has not been successful on this occasion.

We will, however, keep your application on record and may contact you in the future if a suitable vacancy becomes available.

Yours sincerely

Here we have two typical 'introductory phrases'...

I am writing to you

I regret to inform you

These are very much standard phrases and rarely vary in this kind of writing. If you vary standard phrases (by adding 'kindly' 'very much' or something similar) you often make them seem more personal, and this is not usually appropriate in writing this type of

When you read letters, try to spot such phrases. But be careful. It is important to get the form exactly right. Notice

'I regret to inform you...'.

In Bangladesh it is normal to omit the 'you', but this is not possible in standard English. Another common error is to forget the 'it' in

'I would appreciate it if'

And, just as important, notice the form of the sentence which follows, eg:

I regret to inform you that + sentence'

'I regret to inform you of + noun (noun phrase)'

Remember also that standard phrases come into and go out of fashion. What was acceptable and normal yesterday may seem old hat, overly formal or even laughable tomorrow. For example, to begin the letter above with

Reference is made to.....

while perfectly correct grammatically, would seem rather stilted that is, rather too formal.

> succeed 5, reject Missing: 6. Answers: 1. accept 2. begin 3. fail 4.

Contributors this week: Dennis O'Brica. Janet Raynor, Robert Shrubsall

The British Council, 1993

used the opposite of begin? succeed is the opposite of tail; so we