LANGUAGE

The Question of Identity

by Nupu Chaudhuri

read Professor Serajul Islam Chowdhury's thought-provoking article (Bilingualism, Identity and Education) on April 28 last in this magazine with great interest. He made many noteworthy points and defended well his thesis that maintaining one's mother tongue is the crux of conserving one's identity. With all due respect, I would like to offer an alternative view on the question of identity as it pertains to the younger people of the world today.

In the Pocket Word Finder Thesaurus, I looked up "identity" and found these words which may be interchanged: character, disposition, distinctiveness, heart, humour, inclination, individuality, nature, personality, quality, spirit, state, temperament tendency These terms appear more appropriate as they describe more who one is, rather than from where one has come. Due to the increase in emigration, international travel, foreign education, mixed ethnic make-up, dual citizenship etc.. today's younger generation can no longer be easily categorised.

In order to move with the times. standard background information, place of birth, nationality, ethnicity, native language, no longer comply. The young Bangladeshis in England, for instance, will tell

PROFILE

you that these facts alone will not identify them and certainly not define them. They are not fully Bangalee nor are they fully British, but they are emerging as a unique force in society with their own sub-culture. In this difficult and unstable ter ritory, they can view themselves in two ways: that they are part of neither, or that they are part of both. If they define themselves by the former, they will always feel like they will never belong. and will judge other people by their colour, their nationality, or their religion. If they distinguish themselves as the latter, they will feel comfortable in both and other instances. and be secure to evaluate other people beyond these traditional boundaries.

For these young immigrants who feel enough pressure to adapt to the life-styles their friends have and the conflicting stress of conforming to their parents' ideals, it is understandable for them to feel like they belong to neither. However, these young people should not feel it necessary to sever all ties with their past, their heritage, because the learning of their rich history will broaden everyone's minds and horizons; but neither they should they feel guilty for not doing things the way their parents have understood them to be. The parents should re-

alise that society and language evolve through time, and it is neither fair nor appropriate to force their children to identify with their mother tongue which is often as alien as the country into which they are brought. Kahlil Gibran spoke about children to parents most eloquently in his book. The Prophet: "You may give them your love but not your thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls. For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them. but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with

yesterday.

When an Odour of Sanctity Combines

with the Smell of Money

Because I was raised in a multi-racial environment where the children treated each other more equally (barring personal differences) than the adults. I realised early that discrimination is an evil that is acquired, not inborn. began to understand the restrictions in using terms like country, religion, and language as means of identifying myself. These labels give me a set of traits which may describe parts of me, but they fail to allow me to include the new things I learn and adopt as I grow and change. What is also damaging about this confined definition of identity is that it encourages looking for the ways we are different, instead

of the ways we are similar, resulting in marginalising people, not uniting them, and this breeds discrimination. I have been the target of this prejudice most of my life, and while it reinforces me to stand proud of my country and ethnicity, it has reminded me to see people as people, even if they are narrow-minded enough to classify me. I am well aware of my own identity, one that reaches beyond the things others may refuse to

I will undoubtedly continue

to be judged and discriminated

against, but I could never re-

sort to hostility or sycophancy, as neither are as effective as treating people the way I expect to be treated as part of my contribution to seeing beyond provincial boundaries. In today's societies when there are enough limits being placed on younger people, it seems tragic to choose to place more on myself. In today's world, where civil war, "ethniccleansing", religious riots, terrorist hijacking and bombing encourage people to divide amongst themselves, and use stereotypes. I feel an even greater need to want people to see who I am, not merely what I am. This theme was brilliantly portrayed in the classic film about an interracial marriage. Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?, where actor Sidney Poitier says to his father: "You think of yourself as a coloured man. I think of myself as a man." To take this even one step further would be to say, "I think of myself as a human be-

people have 85% of its income

20% is just 1.4%

while the share of the poorest

HE road to Dubai, Bahrain and other Gulf states is no longer paved with gold for engineers from Australia, maids from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and "hardhats" from other developing countries including India.

This army of workers many with college degrees will no longer find it easy to land jobs in the region unless prospective employers qualify under new conditions laid down by Gulf rulers.

In Dubai or Bahrain, for instance, only expatriates drawing a minimum salary of 5,000 Dhirums (US\$1,366) will be eligible to obtain visas for maids or helpers they want for their homes or offices. They must also have family accommodations. Under this setup, only professionals, such as holders of master of business administration (MBAs) degrees and accountants, managers and computer people will find it easy to hire foreign labourers or service personnel.

Maids, who number close to almost a million in the region, must now comply with several rules and regulations. It is now mandatory for them to obtain first an employment visa which will be for a limited period only. Likewise, they have to enter into an employment agreement with employers which has to be approved by

abuse now number in the thouthe maids' respective em-HAFIUL Azam was, by all standards, an exceptionally talented person. I met him only on a few occasions: almost exclusively in official meetings. His formidable intellectual prowess, sense of duty and high-mindedness left indelible impressions on me. The incidents shine ever green in the corridor of my memory and

the facts are worth recalling. I had met Azam socially in parties in the old Hotel Shahbag, in my capacity as a journalist (1964-65). Azam was then rising sharply in the bureaucratic firmament of Pakistan: he became Health Secretary. Government of East Pakistan. Chief Controller of Imports and Exports and Chairman of the EPIDC (East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation) in quick succes-

Azam, of course, enjoyed the reputation of being extremely competent and decisive. I was looking forward to a one-to-one face-to-face conversation with him. The opportunity came in the later part of 1969. The Dhaka Chapter of the CSP Association was meeting for the first time of the year. The meeting had no agenda — not very unusual, as the CSP Association had no written constitution either! Shafiul Azam did not come to the meeting; he was then the Chief Secretary of the East Pakistan Government. By custom and usage, the Chief Secretary would be only a formal member and would not involve himself, personally, in any service association.

Azam therefore, came late. As a matter of fact, he was informed when the meeting was over and tea was being served. The meeting in the meantime had assembled a strategy to face the onslaught that everyone was expecting, under the active encouragement of the

Shattered Dream

CISICIFI CIICIFY BY ARJUNA

Thus, a Filipino maid want-

ing to work in Bubai or else-

where must first get a certifi-

cate of approval from the

Philippine embassy in the

restrictions, the dream of a

good life may have faded for

many would-be overseas work-

ers. Some half a million Indi-

ans, nearly an equal number of

Filipions and thousands of

other Asian workers living and

working in the Gulf may be in

them, particularly domestic

helpers and blue collar work-

ers, have to pack up unless

their employers quality under

the new conditions laid down

mestic helpers is the increas-

ing incidence of rape while

physical abuse seems to have

become the rule rather than

the exception. A report pub-

lished recently said Filipino

maids complaining of sexual

Adding to the woes of do-

Hundreds of thousands of

Because of this and other

country of destination.

for disillusionment.

by Gulf rulers.

Sometimes the maids are so brutally treated that they have to be flown home by diplomatic missions.

In several instances, maids and other workers have to pay large amounts to recruitment agencies which arrange passports for them and their employment.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has been looking at the number of foreign workers in the Gulf but is unable to stop atrocities against them. For thousands of Indians.

Pakistanis, Sri Lankans and Filipions who returned to the region after the Gulf war in search of jobs, even the promise of an easier life through higher wages has faded as prices and the cost of living went up.

Such is the case of 30-yearold Ahmed Khan, a shop assistant from Kerala, with a salary of only 700 Dhirums (US\$191). He saves very little of that salary as he has to pay

back the money loaned by relatives for his passport and visa.

The world-wide recession has not spared even the golden boys of the corporate sector Schools have raised their fees and medical services are cost

ing a lot of money. Recently, too, the Ministry of Immigration slapped a ban on the hiring of foreign doctors and nurses. Apparently there are too many Indian. Pakistani or Bangladeshi doctors and a growing number of nurses from India and the

> Philippines. Expatriates with their own businesses are also faced with more stringent rules for the issuance of bank loans because of many bad loans which the banks do not expect to re-

A sudden rush of Russian engineers. Australian professionals and even British accountants to Dubai and Bahrain also lowered wage levels. A recent arrival from Bombay, accountant Mahumd Ali, said: "We can no longer get salaries of 7,000 or 8,000 Dhirums (US\$1,913-2, 186) per month. This is because Americans with degrees from US universities are quoting lower wages They are ready to work in the Gulf and enjoy the services of a Filipino maid for their families. The status symbol in the Gulf is still a Filipino maid and not the kind of car you drive." -Depthnews Asia

From the Corridor of Memory Personality Profile by AKM Jalaluddin

Shafiul Azam

Yahya junta. from the services reorganization committee headed by Justice Cornerlius. was then in the third year of my service; I felt very bitter and asked the Chief Secretary "Sir, why should we have joined a service that is going to be disbanded?" Azam laughed. He said that my fear was based on inadequate facts. He referred, in some details, to the "dissolution" of the ICS. None had disbanded the ICS, he maintained, it had chosen to dissolve itself.

Shafiul Azam was a total believer in meritocracy. "If you have the merit and a sense of duty and honesty nothing will happen to you." He said, even if the government decided to introduce Cornelius's halfbacked scheme to reorganize services it would take sometime. "By then all of you will be secretaries to Government". Your superior position in the services will have to be vindicated by superiority of performance." His sense of conviction was remarkable and his prediction also proved true. All members of erstwhile CSP of 1966 intake became secretaries of Government a couple of years ago. His sense of conviction was strong and, could truly be, infectious.

The other occasion when I had the opportunity of meeting Shafful Azam was at a meeting he had convened (about Sept-Oct 1976) in his capacity as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. The subject was firming up a rural development project with a considerable budgetary outlay.

I was the juntor most par-

was attended, among others, by Planning Commission member Khair and Finance Secretary Syeduzzaman. I was then a deputy secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Secretary Khorshed Alam was overseas on official business, and Joint Secretary Janab Yahya was stuck up in Sylhet because of a flight cancellation. Hence the small shoulders of a puisne Deputy Secretary had to carry the onerous burden of representing the executing ministry.

ticipant in the meeting which

Being the youngest in the group, I though that silence was the better part of valour. Syeduzzaman gave an excellent rundown of the whole project. And I found that all the points I had jotted down for my intervention were anticipated (1) by Syeduzzaman. I felt relieved that I did not have to face Azam's razor-sharp scrutiny. He was a hard taskmaster and expected everyone to do his homework well.

In the discussion, the question of PL 480 grants came up. Joint Secretary, Dr Ekram Hussain was representing the ERD and made his points with quiet confidence. He said that if we took certain actions the US government would forgive the loan.

The issue of PL 480 grants discussed for some time. Addressing the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Dr Ekram Hussian, the impressive ERD Joint Secretary said, "Sir, they will forgive the outstanding amount if we make the right moves. Now it is only a

matter of formalities."

"Ekram, what are you saying?" Shafiul Azam said with, some passion, "It is only your Creator from whom you can ask for forgiveness; and none else," Azam said emphatically. His sense of conviction left and abiding impression on all. Shafiul Azam was a deeply religious person; not a bigot. He held all religious faiths in re-

'Forgive' was actually a legal jargon used in public law 480 itself. It is an Americanism meaning "write off". Ekram Hussain was right but he apparently did not wish to have further discussion on the subject especially after Shafiul Azam's passionate observation. Azam's sense of conviction could be overpowering and, probably, infectious.

Ekram Hussain said very respectfully, "Sir, we could perhaps deal with this question later on. May we possibly move to other items of the agenda?"

Shafful Azam was in a limbo on is return from Pakistan in 1974. He made only one attempt to see the Head of Government. He would make no other effort to get back his job. Dignity, above all, was the drill-surgeant of his march in

In January 1972, just after the birth of Bangladesh, I happened to hear late Tajuddin Ahmed's (wartime Prime Minister of Bangladesh and later Finance Minister) views on him: "How much do you know About Shafiul Azam?" he asked. "he was our contemporary and we have seen the dazzling

"Sir, then why should not be employed in your government," I asked him as his Private Secretary. "Well, frankly Azam made some mistakes. We are also an immature society. The whole nation is in a state of euphoria; we shall need time to fit him in," he said.

heights of his brilliance."

Hai! Maintenance

Some of Mexico's "Super Rich" are very rich in-

deed. But they also claim a spirtual dimension

through their relationship with a controversial

Catholic priest, Father Jacques. Gemini News Ser-

vice reports on a man who "smells of spirituality" —

John Ross writes from Villahermosa, Mexico

and has a great ability for raising money.

Mexico's economy

shipwrecks on the

shoals of currency coll-

apse, massive layoffs, and

world record bank credits.

business leaders here look

back nostalgically at the boom

now-vilified Carlos Salinas in-

flated economic confidence

with his ambitious free market

made and extolled.

vears when huge fortunes were

During an era when the

the developing count ries pose many technical. logistic and administrative problems; and in addition, the expenditure of hard-earned foreign exchange. The technical staff must be well trained, and the spares must be available in ready stock; especially for the essential services.

with new and evolving technology; and the bureaucracy have not that much general technical knowledge at local level to get things moving fast. Due to poor infrastructure at national network level, servicing is delayed. Reorientation and modernisation courses are is weak in the LDCs.

Let us look at some examples. New X-ray machines are being installed at many Thana Health Complexes (in phases). Can repair, service or maintenance be carried out locally without delay? Are there mo-

HE maintenance of erational honeymoon, poor equipment and gear in maintenance takes its toll, but the alarm bells don't ring (not only in Bangladesh, but in all the under-developed countries). Back to square one: new project, new funding. Money flows, but not the water from the tube wells, or electricity from the generators.

policies. 24 Mexican billion-

aires were created - the

largest number of the "Super

Rich" outside the United

States, Japan, and Germany,

according to Forbes magazine's

which has eaten up more than

half the peso's value, only 14

shakers was 38-year-old Carlos

Mexican billionaires remain.

Now, due to devaluation,

One of those movers and

1994 listings.

One vital weak area may not be overlooked: the human factor due to various forms of Training can never catch up malpractices. This is not a technical or engineering problem, but administrative. based on motivation.

For state maintenance setup, the in-service training structure has to be strong, for output of adequately trained and dedicated personnel. In the project document, it may costly. The servicing structure be more practical to double the maintenance load, as the service degradation curve tends to be logarithmic - difficult to maintain efficiency in the LDCs. The service staff have to be backed up with service tools and instant availability of spares; thereby in-

by Alif Zabr

bile maintenance teams all creasing the inventory budget over the country at public or (including the foreign-exprivate-sector level?

Tens of thousands of face the same problems, as hand/shallow tubewells were they do not possess the magic sunk during the last decade. How many are in operational of less bureaucracy and speedy condition today, compared to back-up from the principals. the average life? What percentage of the shallow pumps the general trend of poor were resunk (replaced with maintenance with which we all new pumps when the old ones are familiar (transport pool could have been serviced) at the same site (or nearby) after intervals of a couple of years? Anybody keeping statistics of the maipractices?

Today we hear much about "system loss" in many sectors of public services. There are two main areas: the technical maintenance, and the human factor (corruption, inefficiency).

Let us take a peep after the VIPs leave after the opening ceremony. Capital projects start with a bang and subsequently threaten to die down with a whimper. After the op-

change component). The pri-Another arbitrary example: vate sector (contractors) will wand, but have the advantage What is depicted above is

paper-work, centralization budget constraints, pilferage. negligence, under-trained and inexperienced technical staff. dependence on foreign spares.

Any scheme can run well. anywhere, if planning is carried out with foresight and accumulated local experience. The foreign manufacturers do not design equipment for developing countries. Small is beautiful, if not imported.

The writer is an internationally recognised expert on maintenance and development of good engineering practices



family-owned department stores into a shrimp and banana empire, his meteoric rise paralleled Salinas' reign

(1988 - 1994).His Del Monte Fresh Produce swallowed up small producers around the Caribbean and eventually the young tycoon bid for the US Del Monte

W HEN I studied the English Romantic Po

worth-Coleridge-Byron-Shel-

lev Keats were to me, the

names of a single entity: a hy-

dra-headed monster that

loomed threateningly before an

examination, in college I had

no time for what I considered.

a bunch of anemic Englishmen

languidly scratching the flow-

ery tablest of poesy with

plumed quills. And I had firmly

pledged my lovalty to the more

full blooded and muscular po-

etry of the Moderns: Yeats, Au-

den Larkin. Ted Hughes, Wal-

lace Stevens, the lot. At uni-

versity I was too busy exploring

the wide world of Comparative

Literature to go back to what I

thought of as, the musty attic

of the Romantics. So for long,

Keats remained to me a vague

figure, a frail and consumptive.

palely loitering persona who

penned "To Autumn" and "Ode

on a Grecian Um, with the

too-famous ending lines:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty.

— that is all / Ye know on earth:

and all ve need to know. Un

ets at school, Words-

Emboldened by government encouragement. Peniche bought one recently privatised bank and joined it to another. At its zenith, his empire included over 1,000 separate enterprises and \$2 billion in as-

Insiders attributed Peni che's success to an amalgam of sources: his friendship with

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The Nightingale that Arrived in Italy had Lost its Power of Singing

I borrowed an armload of books, and quite by accident I came upon a recording of a famous stage actress reciting poetry. After the langour of too much Italian, perhaps my ears were starved for the crispness of well enunciated English. On impulse I took it home and heard the most liquid rendering of Keats' famous Odes and other poems. Then for the first time, reading him separately from the other Romantics usually bracketed with him, and with no exams to take or papers to write. I made the acquaintance of John Keats and was touched to the core by this gentle, idealistic dreamer who had come to Rome to die. I had known that Keats was

buried here in Rome, at the

Presbyterian Cemetery near

thing I could find about him

and felt I knew him more.

stood one day before the door

of the house to the right of the

Spanish Steps and debated

whether to go in or not. My

indecision rested on the fact

that I almost knew what

would find there. The plaque

on the front door said 'Keats-

Shelley Memorial My first re

action was annoyance, for I

the Pyramid of Caius Cestius fortunately that was all I knew of Keats and felt I needed to but I had never bothered to go and visit him. Also to my Rome visitors I had always habitually Then I left the protected academic world of the Ameriand dutifully pointed out the narrow second floor windows can Campus and came to live in Rome thereby shifting the of No. 26 Piazza Spagna as the scene from literature to Hisrooms where Keats lived until tory And as if to prove to me he died. But I had never felt that literature is never far from the urge to go inside and see history events brought me for myself what the place was back to Keats, or Keats to me. like This was when Keats was On an autumn day of mellow a remote personality to me After I finished reading every

fruitfulness. I was taking a leisurely walk at the cross roads of the Via delle Quattro Fontane and the Via del Quirinale, examining some Grecian looking urns when I spied the huge doors of the British Council Library. As I entered and walked up the shallow steps I was transported into my own elements the familiar world of English Literature. On a wave of enthusiasm that day



found it quite inappropriate to include Shelly in a remem brance that should have been dedicated solely Keats, spe cially since Shelley had never been either a particular friend of Keats, nor had he ever stepped into this house. Percy Bysshe had died by drowning near Viareggio in Italy. It is true that the two poets became neighbours in death since they share the same cemetery, where Shelley's heart is buried not far from Keats' grave. But apart from that I could see no reason for the inclusion of an extraneous note in a requiem for Keat If anyone else's name

should be mentioned along with Keats in the context of his last abode and his death, it ought to be Joseph Severn's. the loyal companion of the poet in his final days. Severn. an aspiring young painter had volunteered to accompany the

weak and ailing Keats to Italy helping him through the rough sea passage on the ship 'Maria Crowther. In Rome, he diligently and compassionately nursed the dying poet, sitting up nights watching over him. of which a moving memento is his sketch of the sleeping Keats, signed: "Jan 28th, 3 o clock M. Drawn to keep me awake - a deadly seat was on him all this night." He read to Keats and tried to keep his spirit up, which was an impossible task for both patient and companion, since death was a glaring inevitability. Severn is an important source of information about the last days of Keats. In fact it was in his arms that Keats died, and to whom he rasped his last words: "I am dying —don't be frightened thank God it has come." As someone said of Severn that in spite of his inability to make a name for himself in the world

of his metter, he is assured a place in the history of man's humanity if not in the history of man's art. Since art without humanity, without humane feelings is of no value to man, it is fitting that although Severns name is not mentioned either in the Great Book of Immortals, nor on the door of the house he shared with Keats, in death, thirty years later, he lies buried beside his famous friend.

Back at the house on Piazza Spagna, I decided to enter it. Upstairs, the first room was like a library of the works, correspondences and other relics of not just Keats but the other romantic poets, and also books about their particular world. The next room, the tiny bedroom with the window overlooking the Piazza with Bernini's famous Baracaccia or boat fountain, the room where Keats, on Feb 23rd 1821. breathed his last, was in spite of the furniture and books, absolutely empty. Exactly as I had suspected, it was completely devoid of Keats. This was an empty cell from which a prisoner had escaped, from which Keats Nightingale had flown away. And somehow, this vacuity, this evanescence marking a last flight into the great unknown, seemed appropriate: Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird!", the poet's own words seemed to echo in

this vacant bird-cage. There is a dichotomy in the life of Keats. There is the productive part of his life which began in England from Dec 1st. 1816, when he was just of age and Leigh Hunt, the editor of

the radical 'Examiner', published his sonnet 'On First looking into Chapman's Homer'. Then there is the last bit when dving of consumption, he was almost forcibly sent off to Italy in a last attempt to prolong his life by removing him to warmer climes. He never wanted to leave England and be exiled from all that was dear and meaningful to him. The Nightingale that arrived in Italy had already lost its power of singing and was merely a caged soul. It would be facile to say that

the poet found peace in his

last days, because it isn't true. Physical and spiritual anguish marked the end of his life. Towards the end he dictated to Severn his epitaph. "On my gravestone, you may write -Here lies one whose name was writ in water." To Keats lovers, the nightmarish last months of the poet's life is a great burden, difficult to justify and too sad to be redeemed even by poetry. And to those who are. in addition, lovers of Rome, it feels ironic, even unjust that a sensitive and sensuous poet like Keats should have come to this inspiring city so late when, ill and despairing. robbed of his gift for poetry. homesick and heartbroken from his separation from the love of his life - Fanny Brawne. he had already turned inward and bitter, calling this Roman stage of his life, his posthumus existence The claustrophobic room

near the Spanish steps is a reminder of the most abject period of Keats' life and need less to say, in all my years in Rome. I have never gone back to that ringing void. On the other hand. I find the Protestant Cemetery an almost cheerful place which, with its intimate charm, someone aptly described as being like an Continued on page 12