

T A N G E N T S

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Too Many Words?

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Praising Brevity

A French gourmet is invited to Turkey by a Turkish gourmet. Upon his return, his countrymen anxiously surround him. The French, after all, are serious about food. So how does Turkish food compare? "It is fantastic, delicious!" raves our Frenchman, disappointing his friends. "But..." he pauses. "But what?" they ask hopefully. "But...too many dishes," he says. The Frenchmen heave a sigh of relief. Their Turkish rivals don't know their own strength.

This story is from the great Bengali writer Syed Mujtaba Ali.

Mujtaba complains that Bengali hosts serve too many items at dinner parties. "We did not know which dish you would like, so eat the one you like most," the host counters. But that means the host does not know his or her masterpiece. "Does a novelist offer five different endings and let you choose the one you like?" Mujtaba asks, exasperated.

Indeed, our national assault on brevity starts early. When fewer words will do, students are taught to use more. As adults, these same students deliver speeches whose preambles, which should be "Dear Listeners", drag on for several minutes (and let's not talk about the substance of the speeches.) As a society we love long-winded language rather than compactness.

If that were not bad enough, some years ago a local mobile phone company started an ad campaign saying "Talk more." It made the hair on my neck stand up.

I used to think verbosity is a defensive reflex of Bangladeshis. Crammed into the small physical area of this country,

do we subconsciously stake out a vast space in the universe of words by talking more?

But now I find wordiness is everywhere. The American writer Jonathan Franzen's much-discussed novel, *Freedom*, weighs in at 576 pages. Tony Blair's recent autobiography is a whopping 720 pages. Does anyone actually finish these books?

In *Amadeus*, the movie based on Mozart's life, there is an exchange between Mozart and his patron, Emperor Joseph II. Mozart plays a piece he has composed for the Emperor. The Emperor likes it, but since he is Emperor, he feels he must criticise it. "It is good, but it has too many notes," he says, "cut a few". The precocious Mozart quickly retorts, "Then which notes would Your Majesty like me to cut?" For this the Emperor has no answer, for the piece has precisely the number of notes it needs, no more, no less.

Producing something worthwhile may require long hours of hard work but what we cherish is the final result looking effortless, every piece falling into place. Thus, seeing a graceful Olympic diver in action just for seconds uplifts us. He never has to remind us of his years of hard work. Songs by Tagore enchant us because they capture so much in just a few lines. Mujtaba's short essays scintillate with his witty storytelling.

Sure, there are times when length is necessary, but wouldn't the world be a neater place without needless words, dishes, notes - or speeches?

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11 killed, 29 hurt in road accidents

METRO DESK

Eleven people were killed and 29 others injured in separate road accidents in Gaibandha, Faridpur, Dinajpur, Jenidah and Natore yesterday.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: Five persons were killed and 15 others injured when a microbus and a bus collided head-on on Bogra-Rangpur highway at Boali. The deceased are Helaluddin, 45, Ruma, 26, Sifat Babu, 6, Ananna, 10 and Eti, 7.

Our Faridpur correspondent adds: Two people were killed and 12 injured in a head-on collision between a bus and a truck on Dhaka-Khulna highway at Moslondopur in Modhukhali upazila of Faridpur. The deceased are Motam Gazi, 22, of Khulna and Sajib, 23, the bus driver.

Our Dinajpur correspondent says: Two people were killed and two other injured in separate road accidents. First accident took place when a bus hit a motorcycle at Birampur upazila, killing Badiuzzaman, 18. Second one occurred when a speedy truck hit Kanduribala, 69, on Parbatipur-Saidpur highway at Parbatipur upazila.

Our Jhenidah correspondent adds: A bicyclist, Abdus Satter, 40, was killed under the wheels of a bus at Gulshanmor of Kaliganj upazila.

Our Natore correspondent reports: A rickshaw van puller, Abdul matin, 40, was killed when his wood-laden van flipped at Khezultala of Sadar upazila.



KNOWLEDGE CORNER

CHAMPS21

COMMUNICATION THROUGH AGES

The most basic and universal form of communication is probably gestures. However, as it is not possible to exchange much with gestures, the dominant way of communicating among the humans is speaking. The existence of spoken language predates almost all other methods of communicating.

Speech, as a method of communication cannot store ideas. This need pushed the invention of symbols. The oldest known uses of symbols are Cave Paintings of Paleolithic Era (32000 BP). Cave Painting evolves to Petroglyph, then Pictogram and finally to Writing.

The oldest known forms of writings were Logographic where a symbol was described by a picture. Hieroglyphs (4000 BC) are one such example, which was developed by the Egyptians. The final development in writing was due to the Alphabets, which is a set of symbols describing phonemes in a spoken language. Writing becomes popular and easier with the invention of Paper in China (105AD).

Telecommunication is a word for transmission of information over distant places. In 1792, Claude Chappe, a French engineer, built the first telegraph system known as Semaphore Line. However, these lines didn't become much popular as they needed expensive towers with a skilled operator in only 10-30 km distance.

The first popular and widely used telecommunication system was Electrical Telegraph. They could transmit coded signals (mostly Morse Code) over a long distance using electrical relays. The first commercial telegraphs' system was deployed in 1839. In 1866, first successful transatlantic telegraph cable was completed. Telephone was patented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876.

The World entered the age of wireless communication with the invention of Radio in the Early Twentieth Century. Both Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose of Bangladesh and Guglielmo Marconi of Italy were credited for the development of Radio independently. Along with voice, it became possible to transmit motion pictures as well when Scottish inventor John Logie Baird demonstrated the first Television in 1925.

EVOLUTION OF COMPUTER

The term Computer, originally meant a person capable of performing numerical calculations with the help of a mechanical computing device. The evolution of computers started way back in the late 1930s. Binary arithmetic is at the core of the computers of all times. History of comput-

ers dates back to the invention of a mechanical adding machine in 1642.

ABACUS, an early computing tool, invention of the logarithm by John Napier and the invention of slide rules by William Oughtred were significant events in the evolution of computers from these early computing devices. Konrad Zuse's, of Germany, came up with the series Z electromechanical computers. In 1941, Zuse built Z3, which used binary arithmetic and was controlled by programs. In 1998, Z3 was tested and found to be Turing complete i.e. a fully operational computer which used electromagnets.

Out of these efforts to harness machines to calculate the trajectories of the cannon shells, in 1946, came ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) which was hailed as the first true all-purpose electronic computer. Its principle inventors John Mauchly and J. Presper Eckert, were regarded for a long time, as the inventors who made the first computer.

ENIAC was a very big machine, and it weighed almost 30-tons. It was complex machine and employed 19,000 vacuum tubes and 6,000 switches to do the calculations. By 1946 standards, its speed at addition of 5,000 numbers in a second, was unheard of and unmatched for.

However, the initial model of ENIAC needed to be rewired to change its programming because of its inflexible architecture. Developed in the war phase of 1942, Atanasoff-Berry Computer (ABC) was the world's first fully electronic digital computer. Its inventors, John Vincent Atanasoff & Clifford Berry shared the relationship of a professor and a student. John was an American electronics engineer while Clifford his student.

Intel produced large-scale integration circuits in 1971. During the same year, Micro Computer came up with microprocessor and Ted Hoff, working for Intel introduced 4-bit 4004. In 1972, Intel introduced the 8080 microprocessors. In 1974, Xerox came up with Alto workstation at PARC. It consisted of a monitor, a graphical interface, a mouse, and an Ethernet card for networking.

Apple Computer brought about the Macintosh personal computer in January 24, 1984. These years witnessed the development of the third generation computers. They were based on integrated circuits.

Computer systems of this period have large storage capacities and high processing powers. Multi-core CPUs became available in the 21st century. Laptops, palmtops, handheld PCs, notebook computers and tablet PCs are popular today. Computer development still continues.

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Initiative of The Daily Star & teamcreative



Behag Jamil Khan, competing in child category, performs at the 30th Jatiya Rabindra Sangeet Sammelan organised by Rabindra Sangeet Sammelan Parishad at Public Library in the city's Shahbagh yesterday.



Human chain

Organiser: Paribesh Bachao Andolan, Venue: Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, Time: 10:30am.

Anniversary

Organiser: Weekly Samadha, Venue: Hotel '71, Bijoynagar, Time: 4:00pm.

Protest rally

Organiser: Communist Party of Bangladesh, Venue: Purana Paltan, Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion

Organiser: Bangladesh Enterprise for Development and Security Studies, Venue: DRU, Time: 11:00am.

Website inauguration

Organiser: Barishal Web, Venue: Institution of Diploma Engineers, Kakrail, Time: 4:00pm.

Roundtable

Organiser: Bangladesh Wonders Promotion Foundation, Venue: National Press Club, Time:

Body of minor girl found in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered a decomposed body of a minor girl from Jatrabari in the city around 11:00 am yesterday.

Police said the body of the unidentified girl, aged around four, was floating on a water body under a bridge at West Matuail.

The girl, wearing black half pant and T-shirt, might have been killed elsewhere two or three days back, said Jatrabari police.



Scholarship 2011-2012



As an authorised International Baccalaureate (IB) School, International School Dhaka (ISD) provides a high-quality international education to students aged 2-19. ISD offers all three IB programmes: the Diploma Programme (DP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and the Primary Years Programme (PYP).

ISD wishes to announce a limited number of tuition-assisted places in the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP, Grades 8 & 10) and the IB Diploma Programme (DP, Grade 11 for those who have passed "O" Levels or equivalent).

Requirements: Applicants of any nationality aged 12-17 and obtaining grades of 85% or equivalent in key subjects may apply. Applicants have to sit for scholarship examinations.

For more information and the application forms, please visit www.isdbd.org or the ISD Admissions Office. The deadline for submission is: 10/03/2011 and can be submitted in person or online at admissions@isdbd.org by 12:00 pm.

Scholarship Examinations held on: 19/03/2011 at 08:30 am.

Interested candidates and families are invited to an IB Information Evening on 6th March 2011 at 06:30 pm at the ISD Auditorium.

Plot 80, Block E, Bashundhara R/A, Dhaka 1229
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www.isdbd.org

We Mourn



Late Shahed Noman

We are deeply shocked and grieved at the sad demise of **Shahed Noman (60)**, former Managing Director of Dhaka Bank Limited, died of Cardiac arrest on Thursday February 24, 2011 (Innalillahe wa Innaillahihe Rajeun). He was survived by his wife, two sons, relatives and friends.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Management and all employees of Dhaka Bank Limited, we express our heartfelt condolence to the bereaved family and pray to the Almighty Allah to grant eternal peace to the departed soul.