

A deplorable failure in literacy plan efforts

THE government's failure to complete the preparatory work for the five-year Basic Literacy Project, by way of which the government in February 2014 planned to provide basic literacy and life skills for 4.5 million of the adult and the adolescent in the age group of 15-45 years by 2018, is deplorable. The project is designed to involve 250 non-governmental organisations as partners in the process of imparting basic literacy and life skills to such a huge number of marginalised people living in remote areas through about 150 thousand teachers recruited from local communities. The project at the cost of Tk 4.53 billion is supposed to complete the task through 75,000 non-formal learning centres in 250 upazilas in all the 64 districts in phases. People belonging to various ethnic groups, living in slums and the extreme poor are to be picked up on a priority basis, aiming for a holistic approach to eradicate illiteracy. After a long gap after the Total Literacy Movement, which ran from 1997 till 2003, this is the first such comprehensive programme aimed at eradicating illiteracy but preparatory work, unfortunately, could not be completed in two years into the project duration.

Such a situation only brings to the fore the inefficiency of the government and its indifference towards changing the fate of the poor by turning them into productive citizens. The project in question was taken against the backdrop of the national goal to rid the country of illiteracy by 2014, which could not be achieved. The Basic Literacy Project also followed the Total Literacy Movement which could not be completed because of rampant corruption in some of its component although it could bring about some, if not by a large degree, benefits. Such a situation also points to a probable corruption that could play behind the delay of the project at hand. Although the director of the project sought to explain worries that the delay has brought about by saying that all the preparations would be made soon and the project could be completed by the 2018 deadline, it is not assuring enough as the preparation includes the selection of non-governmental organisations, the recruitment of teachers, the establishment of the learning centres and the printing of about five million copies of reading materials which would certainly take a substantial amount of time.

As time is running out, the government, thus, is left with no option but to step up the pace in implementing the Basic Literacy Project that holds immense importance for the nation in its march forward. While doing whatever the government can, it must also look into issues of corruption, as the one in some components which frustrated the Total Literacy Movement project earlier, not to squander away the huge amount of money that it is putting in the project.