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## Pledge to eliminate illiteracy not kept

Mohiuddin Alamgir | Updated at 12:47am on September 08, 2018

International Literacy Day would be observed today while back-to-back Awami League-led governments failed to eradicate illiteracy in Bangladesh although the party promised to do so by 2014 in its election manifesto before the parliamentary polls in 2008.

Officials and education activists blamed poor planning, irregularities and corruption in projects implemented to increase literacy rate.

In the manifesto for 2014 general election, the Awami League promised to continue all projects and programmes taken for illiteracy eradication. The National Education Policy 2010 and the Sixth Five-Year Plan also set the target of eradication of illiteracy by 2014.

Dhaka University professor emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said that the government set up the target of elimination of illiteracy by 2014 for taking 'political advantages' and it was 'not serious and ardent' about the target.

He was also sceptical about the figure of 72.9 per cent literacy rate in Bangladesh as so many people were still illiterate.

About four months ahead of completing consecutive second term of the government, primary and mass education minister Mostafizur Rahman, citing the statistics from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, claimed that the country achieved the literacy rate of 72.9 per cent.

Finance minister AMA Muhith on September 5 said that the next general election was likely to be held on December 27.

The bureau, in its Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2017, released in June 2018, said that adult literacy rate among population of 15+ years stood 72.9 per – 75.7 per cent male and 70.1 per cent female.

The rate was 48.8 per cent among the same age group in 2008, according to the BBS Literacy Assessment Survey 2008.

The literacy rate for people aged 15 years and above was 35.3 in 1991.

The report estimated 16.27 crore population on July 1, 2017 meaning that 4.40 crore people were still illiterate.

'We are trying. We informed whatever success we have. No research was done on the failure,' Mostafizur Rahman said, adding that the government was implementing a basic literacy project aiming to make 45 lakh people literate.

A top Bureau of Non-Formal Education official said that it would not be possible to eradicate

illiteracy quickly.

'Awami League leaders made the promise before the elections but when the education policy and the five-year plan were framed, the reality was different. They also did not take any serious step in this regard,' said the official.

He said, 'A comprehensive plan and earnest implementation helped Russia to increase literacy rate to 87 per cent from 57 between 1926 and 1939. In Cuba, the literacy rate reached 96 per cent from 76 in a single year, 1961.'

The literacy rate in Tanzania reached 73 per cent from 23 between 1970 and 1977 while in Nicaragua, the rate reached 87 per cent from 50 in a single year in 1980, he added.

Bureau of Non-Formal Education officials said that government took no project to address illiteracy till 2014 through the bureau. Other programmes for skill development of the literate, however, have been implemented by the bureau in recent years.

Assuming power in 2009, the government reportedly designed a Tk 3,000 crore Basic Literacy and Continuing Education Project 1 and 2 to address illiteracy, but failed to attract donors.

The last project to address illiteracy, Total Literacy Movement, started in 1996, drew widespread allegations of corruption and irregularities, discouraging donors to support such projects ever since.

The government is now implementing a Tk 452 crore Basic Literacy Project to reach 45 lakh people of 15-45 years at its own funding.

Quoting the Education for All Progress Report of Bangladesh 2012, the bureau officials said that in between 2012 and 1991, governments had implemented a number of projects at an estimated cost of Tk 2,500 crore, with Tk 1,000 crore from the state exchequer, for eradication of illiteracy and skill development and education for drop out students, but the effect was a little.

Dhaka University Institute of Education and Research director Syeda Tahmina Akhter said that the government had no required holistic planning and initiatives to eradicate illiteracy.

She said that many children were still out of school, many still dropped out even after enrolling at schools.

Serajul Islam Choudhury and Syeda Tahmina Akhter said that government should launch countrywide campaign to make people aware of merits of being literate and take holistic planning to eradicate illiteracy.

'Not only planning, but also proper, transparent implementation of the plans is also needed,' Syeda Tahmina Akhter said.

The government will continue its effort as long as a single person remains illiterate, Mostafizur Rahman said.



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