

Literate Magura

Illiteracy has long been identified as Bangladesh's biggest bane. Successive governments since independence have pledged to rid the country of this curse, but without success. Various factors including poor utilisation of funds and failure to develop a cadre of dedicated, well-trained teachers have combined to thwart both primary school and adult literacy campaigns. But there is a piece of good news at last. The district of Magura has now been declared fully literate, following completion of the "Bikoshito Magura" programme under the government's Total Literacy Movement. According to government claims, 200,000 adults of the district were made literate over a period of a year and half.

However, past experiences suggest that success of Magura be evaluated carefully. First question that can be raised is whether all adults were covered under the programme. The second would be whether "literacy" means a mere ability to sign names, or functional literacy which enables people to read and write freely. Third is whether there is any follow up programme in place to retain the literacy. Without such follow-ups, newly-literate persons may soon relapse into illiteracy through lack of application. Finally, it needs to be asked whether primary school enrolment rate has reached 100 per cent in the district. Primary school enrolment is important because without it a new generation of illiterate persons would be created behind the facade of "illiteracy-free Magura".

Answers to these questions are vital, because without these, the true impact of the programme cannot be assessed. Without a proper assessment of the impact, the programme's success or failure cannot be reliably claimed either. It is important that the government has an independent review made of the programme in order to get a clear picture. This would enable the government to make necessary adjustments and replicate the programme in all other 63 districts of the country. If "Bikoshito Magura" can be replicated, with or without changes, then the curse of adult illiteracy can indeed be banished from the country.