

The Retention of Literacy

The claim was evidently very tall — Entire population of the district (Magura) are now free from the curse of illiteracy after completion of a six-month long literacy drive. The news report published by The Daily Star said a total of 200,100 people were given preliminary knowledge of reading and writing through 6,670 mass education centres in four thanas.

Giving the happy tidings DC Nuruzzaman Khan told a news agency Prime Minister Hasina would herself make a formal announcement of the achievement in a public meeting on September 16. This last piece of information seals the chance of any lack of authenticity of the report. And we can safely rejoice over the achievement of Magura.

Ridding some area of illiteracy somehow rings a bell in the mind. In fact, many bells. It started possibly at Mithapukur, Rangpur in Pakistan times and how we all celebrated it! No one possibly lied over Mithapukur's achievement. But then in the following years the area was found to be as bristling with illiterates as anywhere else in Bangladesh.

Then there is the suspicious-sounding wordings — given preliminary knowledge of reading and writing. How much time do the primary schools need to 'literate' a child of five? Mind that the child is then at its highest receptive brain power. How much time will it take to effectively enable an adult to read and write? Six months of intensive instruction perhaps can do it if it is imparted without gaps. But six months of continuous intensive training for two lakh adults is an impossible proposition for everywhere except Magura.

The alphabet is such a wonderful invention of man that one needn't learn all the ways this can be manipulated. One can self-teach much of these after one has been led into its rudiments. This facility is balanced, unfortunately, by the fact that new literacy rusts fast if not exercised by poring over ever new reading material. While congratulating the Magura people on their achievement, we want to underline that second aspect of literacy.