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ABOUT a third of all who completed their primary education in the past year still lacking ability at reading, writing and using arithmetic, as the Education Watch Report 2016 launched on Monday says, brings to the fore the failure that has mired the national education system. The percentage of such students having lack in literacy skills on completion of primary education in 2002, as it came up in the Education Watch Report that year, was 35.6, which shows that the situation has barely improved. What is further concerning, as New Age reported, is that a half, or 48.7 per cent to be specific, of the total population aged 11 years and above are illiterate whereas the figure in such case in 2002 was 58.6 per cent, which shows that government efforts in improving on the literacy rate, remustering a slow pace of progress, has been far too inadequate all these years between 2002 and now. What is deplorable in this is that with such a slow pace of improvement on the literacy front, it may take at least 44 more years, as the education report says, for the nation to have the population aged above 11 years to be fully literate.

For the population aged 15 years and above, literacy rate increased from 38.8 per cent in 2002 to 47.3 per cent in 2016, as the education report showed. While this continues, the government claims to have achieved 71 per cent literacy rate, understandably for the population aged seven years and above, without mentioning the age range. The literacy assessment survey that the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics conducted in 2011, however, put the literacy rate at 53.7 per cent, based on all the components of literacy skills for the population aged in the range of 11-45 years. The primary and mass education minister rightly said that there was no scope for debate on the issue, which has been the result of a study that employed a scientific method to establish the actual literacy situation through oral and written test of 11,668 people aged above 11 years of 3,510 households, but he sought to pass the blame on primary teachers for being inattentive to classroom teaching. Classroom teaching has already come to be criticised for not being aided enough by the required teacher training and even recruitment of good teachers but it is the government, the ministries and government agencies concerned for that matter that is to blame for such a situation.

It is true that good classroom teaching comes with good teachers, but the government also needs to understand that good teachers alone cannot bring about a meaningful change unless a good academic environment is created with the aid of regular teacher training and other logistics. The government thus needs to step up its plate as much in improving primary education as in eradicating illiteracy, both of which appear to have been low on agenda for quite a long time.