

## Literacy: The Goal

Among the many problems facing the country illiteracy is the most difficult one. It persists even in the urban centres whereas in other countries the rate of urban literacy is high. And in the rural sector illiteracy continues to hang on despite initiation of the children into primary schooling largely because of the fact that the need for using 3 Rs is not felt by the general masses. Because of the inability of most of the families to keep their children in school for the entire period of schooling, the rate of literacy does not show any upward trend. And the given facilities of schools and libraries are inadequate for a mass literacy programme from all points of view.

That being the state of affairs in the field of education, nothing short of a revolutionary move may extricate the society from illiteracy. The same is appreciated in the policy circle in the country and President Ziaur Rahman has rightly embarked on his programme for mass literacy through a nationwide call. He called upon all to work for "removal of illiteracy from the country within five years", a time schedule that did give many other countries fruitful results. This is the second phase of the revolution, which the present authorities has embarked upon with the zeal of reformers. The entire administrative machinery has been geared under the leadership of the President to achieve the goals of literacy. The President's Secretariat and the coordination cell therein will put together the programmes taken up by the Ministry of Education for materializing the objectives.

As it is, the programme is scheduled to be started from 21 February, the most memorable day in the history of Bangladesh. For this the supporting activities including publication of books, acquisition of educational materials and expansion of physical facilities have to be taken up without further delay. In this connection it is worth suggesting that the literacy programme should be supplemented with non-formal education through which aged people may also be taught the skill needed for performance of their duties. And one may add

that skilled and educated workforce may increase the potential growth of the economy, which lies at the base of all developmental activities.

The programme for initiating around eighty per cent of the population into literacy cannot be implemented without involvement of the masses and without phasing the activities rationally. The army of teachers needed for the schooling of so many people may be drawn from among the educated but unemployed youths and the skilled manpower operating in different sectors. For this a massive training programme for teachers is a must and the existing institutional facilities have to be fully utilized, if necessary by conducting afternoon and evening courses for training of teachers. For the artisans and skilled people to be drafted for advancing non-formal education, the need would be in the area of supplying the tools and equipment and the workshop facilities. These are no small demands and the planning agencies geared to the education sector should come forward with necessary projects. And priority should be given to this programme for meeting its ends.

Admittedly the inter-sectoral priorities in a resource-hungry country are very difficult to be set. As of today education comes after agriculture, industry and other physical infrastructural activities in terms of allocation of resources. Complete reversal of priority may be quite difficult. What is needed therefore is to tap locally available resources side by side with the allocation of central resources for a better deal. This will demand survey of local areas for identification of men and material that could be used for literacy programme. Above all, the policy makers must utilize the techniques developed in other countries for augmenting the efficacy of the programmes. Even the principle of 'each one-teach-one' adopted by other countries seeking an end of the abysmal malaise of illiteracy can be tried for the programme. The entire programme is lofty and it is hoped that people in all walks of life will extend support to it and thereby ensure the achievement of the goals.