

DACCA THURSDAY JULY 27 1978

Mass Literacy

The reported decision by the government to set up a National Council for mass literacy is quite in line with the President's declared policy of dealing more effectively with one of the fundamental national issues. The literacy rate in this country is about 20% and even so the rate of higher literacy is minimal.

In respect of high, middle, or elementary education Bangladesh, both regionally and globally, is in a very unenviable position. If the history of progress in the modern world is any guide revolutions in most countries of the world in this century has led to one thing in particular, and that is raising and extensifying the rate of education. And that for the simple reason that education on a national scale alone could provide viable infrastructure of national progress in almost all spheres from industrial efficiency to domestic felicity and management.

Deprivation suffered in this vital regard therefore has been long-standing and great in this country. Even for democratic principles to be worked out purposefully literacy is a must at the people's level. Welfare organisation, social service, population control, elementary medicare, child-rearing, maternal health and security and in a hundred other ways the knowledge at least of the three R's can be a great asset in the national sense. And the root cause of much of our misery at the popular—or rural—level is lack of literacy. These however are among the most well-known facts and need not be dwelt on at any length. The need of the hour is action on the required national

scale and in accordance with a neatly formulated policy and programme. The proposed National Council has reportedly been assigned the task of drawing up an action programme expeditiously.

Mass literacy is for us an overwhelmingly massive rural problem. And that for obvious reasons. Now that the country has local administrative organs provided by the Union Parishads, planned action throughout the country should neither be difficult to begin nor should wait long. Of course existing voluntary organisations would reasonably be available to cooperate in making such a programme a success. But the primary responsibility—administrative, managerial, operational instructional supervisory shall henceforth rest with the National Council. In every union, to begin with, services of the educated minority must be made available for this purpose. And that also needs to be governed by a system included in the programme to be formulated by the National Council. Material equipment including rudimentary educational materials could be conveniently drawn from a central pool set up for this purpose. Literacy centres established have also to be kept going on a regular basis and subjected to periodical inspection of the progress made by them. Tests introduced might be a psychological stimulus from a sense of competition and a success in it. Indeed an imaginative planning of the whole thing is bound to generate a real popular enthusiasm among both men and women in our villages where illiteracy has been one of the worst of curses of rural life for centuries.