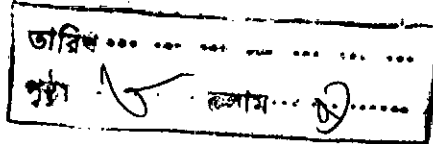


6/20/2000



Literacy Drive—A Glimpse Of Hope.

ASM Shahjahan

EDUCATION is a basic human right. It acts as the guiding force in all sectors of development. In poverty alleviation, flourishing of democracy, economy and for creating awareness the only but effective magic is educating the people.

But, our country is yet to reach the expected height of development despite having a huge human resource vibrant with life and vigour. However, very recently, we have achieved commendable success in some areas including literacy. Literacy rate has rose to 65.5 per cent. We hope this trend would continue to help us achieve universal literacy by 2006.

There has been improvement in various internal efficiency indicators of primary education in recent past. Gross enrollment rate has increased from 92% in early 1990's to 100% in 1998. Primary cycle dropout rate has been reduced to about 30 per cent. However, according to independent research like the Education Watch 1999, achievement level has improved from 27% to 30%. There is no more gender disparity in enrollment and attendance. It indicates how the political will combined with people's participation could work miracle.

Education is recognized as a fundamental right in our constitution. According, government

has accorded top priority to education. Universal Primary Education Project was first launched in 1981 for a period of five years. The Second Phase of UPE also continued up to 1990. In 1981 the Directorate of Primary Education was created. The CPE programme was introduced from January 01, 1992 in 68 thanas and the entire country was covered under the CPE programme.

Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Declaration on Survival, Protection and Development of Children and EFA World Declaration. Government has accepted these documents as guidelines for universal quality education.

After the World Conference on EFA, a National Plan of Action of EFA by 2000 was prepared with a firm commitment to ensure access, equity and quality in primary education and to reduce illiteracy. In order to provide full administrative and policy support to basic education, a separate division PMED was created in August 1992 with the status of a Ministry.

Directorate of Non-formal Education launched a massive literacy programme. It has so far covered approximately 17 million learners. The rest 17 million learners will be made literate in the next few years. To sustain these massive achieve-

ments, Government has decided to embark on post literacy and continuing education programme with assistance from the World Bank and ADB. 1.6 million neo-literates will be covered through the World Bank project. On the otherhand, another 2 million learners will be covered through ADB assistance.

Resource mobilization has remained a perpetual problem for the poor countries. In Jomtien, we put the goalpost at 2000, and now as it has struck, we push the goal post further to 2015 and then again we set a target of achieving 50% of the world's adult literacy.

We do hope that our international partners will keep their promise that 'no country with a viable action plan should fail because of lack of resources'. This commitment has given our Government a challenge—the challenge of preparing a 'viable national plan of action'.

Government has already initiated the process of preparing our national plan of action for EFA. A National EFA Forum has been constituted with representatives from other concerned ministries, agencies, NGOs and civil society. This Forum will help PMED to prepare the National Plan of Action as per guidelines set and commitments made in Dakar. This National Consultation, I hope, will provide us pragmatic directions to help us in formulat-

ing the NPA particularly in the area of identification of roles and responsibilities of NFA partners.

Government will be the driving force in all our actions, but the role and responsibilities of other EPA partners and stakeholders are very important for achieving the goals. We can't achieve 'education for all' without the active participation and spontaneous contribution of everybody—partners, teachers, learners, community leaders, politicians, researchers, NGOs, human rights groups and development partners. Its an war against illiteracy, deprivation, underdevelopment and all of us are comrades in this struggle.

Government should try our best to provide space and scope for collaboration by other EFA partners. There has to be conscious and continuous efforts by all stakeholders to bridge the gap. I would request our civil society groups and development partners present here, to continue their efforts for fostering and promoting more and more effective collaboration among all stakeholders.

(The author is the advisor in charge of Ministry of Education, Primary and Mass Education Division, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Youth and Sport.)