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Need To Eradicate Illiteracy More Urgent Than Ever

THERE are 889 million illiterates, of the age 15 and above in the world today. 98 per cent of all illiterates live in the developing countries. Sixty per cent of them are women. If the present trend continues, there will be more than 900 million illiterates by the year 2000. These and other facts were released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to mark September 8, which was observed throughout the world, as the International Literacy Day.

The observance of the International Literacy Day is of particular importance to the countries of the Asia-Pacific region because three quarters or about 666 million of the total illitera-

tes live in this region, particularly in the countries of South Asia and China.

Though the rate of illiteracy has gone down in Asia from 46 per cent in 1970 to 36 per cent in 1985, the actual number of illiterates has gone up. This has been caused by the rise in population growth which now stands at 3 billion—nearly two thirds of the world.

In spite of heavy population pressure, several Asian countries have made significant progress

in teaching rural masses how to read and write. Today nine Asian countries, including Thailand, Republic of Korea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, etc. have attained a literacy rate of above 80 per cent. There are five others who are quickly following suit, namely Fiji, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Turkey.

In 1985, the literacy campaign in Laos received Unesco Award with those in Thailand, India, Vietnam China and Bangladesh receiving honourable mention. This year, for Asian countries

UNESCO is introducing a special prize for "Literacy Reading Materials for Adults" called the Nessim Habib prize, named after a Turkish philanthropist, who died in 1960 and wanted his fortune to be used in promoting literacy work throughout the world.

The Tokyo based Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO has declared that they will start the ACCU Literacy Prize for 1986 and has agreed to provide a gift of music tapes to all participating projects in the Nessim Habib Award competition.

Unesco has already selected a 4 member international jury who will announce the Nessim Habib Award in a special ceremony in Bangkok on September 26.