

Hasina delivers key-note speech at world confce

Global community urged to help stamp out illiteracy

HAMBURG, July 14:— Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called upon the world community to launch a concerted drive to free the developing countries from the curse of illiteracy that created disparity in human society, reports UNB.

"Today all of us must work to forge a structure of cooperation to usher in a global community completely free from illiteracy," she said delivering key-note speech at the UNESCO-sponsored international conference on adult education here today (Monday).

The Bangladesh Prime Minister said it is time now for the world community to make a concerted effort to eradicate illiteracy, which is one of the main causes of disparity in the global family.

In this age of ideas and dominance of intellectual capital, she said, "we must ensure that our people have the education and skills to tap the emerging information and communications technologies."

The conference, presided over by Speaker of German Parliament Prof Rita Süssmuth, was also addressed by German President Prof Roman Herzog, UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor and first mayor of Hamburg Dr Henning Voscherar.

A noteworthy speech was delivered by an aged learner from a tiny village of South Africa, Ms N Kusmatchi Methuka.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister also urged the world community to forge concerted efforts to address the following issues in order that the

curse of illiteracy can be removed from the face of earth as early as possible:

—Creating awareness of learning needs among target-groups through extensive social mobilisation. Intensifying the struggle against illiteracy through the alliance of government and non-government agencies.

—Seeking cooperation of countries which have demonstrated remarkable achievement in the field of adult education. Linking formal and non-formal education under the perspective of life-long learning.

—Ensuring high quality of adult and continuing education programmes through mutual sharing of ideas and resources. Prioritising women's literacy and enhancing the scope for their empowerment.

—Linking functional education, skill development, income-generating activities, micro-credit approaches with continuing education programme.

—Ensuring that the highest priority is given to adult education programmes both by the respective governments as well as aid agencies.

Sheikh Hasina told the meet that her government is committed to structural reforms in the field of literacy that must accompany its drive for eradicating poverty through education and empowerment of the people.

"We consider education at all levels as one of the major factors of poverty alleviation," she said reaffirming her commitment to eradicate

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illiteracy from Bangladesh within next 10 years.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said nearly 900 million population predominantly belonging to developing nations are illiterate. With technology advancing steadily they find themselves in an increasingly disadvantageous position.

Gap between literate and illiterate in a developing society is likely to grow wider in future, she said, adding a Human Development Centre has recently termed South Asia the poorest, most illiterate, most malnourished, least gender-sensitive and the most deprived region in the world. This region has a very low female literacy rate.

She said adult literacy covers all aspects of continuing education. In modern industrialized societies, continuing education has become an accepted phenomenon. In this system, more than one-third of the population participate every year in organized educational activities.

The educational scenario in these countries shows that adult learners now exceed the total population of students in primary and secondary schools, she told the conference.

It has been universally recognized that basic education is one of the prime factors in economic, social and political development. Empirical studies indicate a strong and positive relationship between investments in basic education and changes in economic productivity, she said.

Hasina said education also has a relationship with health and social wellbeing, the growth of democracy and the conservation of environment.

A recent study found that farmers with only four years of education are 9 per cent more productive than farmers with no education. Literacy gains of 20 to 30 per cent can boost a nation's GDP by 6 to 8 per cent, improve nutritional status significantly.

The Prime Minister said the concept of adult education is not new in Bangladesh. After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, our great leader,

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Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, felt the utmost necessity of education for national development and prosperity.

"With the brutal killing of Bangabandhu whole process of developing the country was shattered and disrupted and the people were deprived of their right to franchise," she told the world leaders.

This was followed by a period marked by coups, killings, exploitation and oppression. The people were neglected and their life became unbearable under poverty, illiteracy, terrorism and tyranny, Hasina said.

"Our government formed the National Committee to frame an Education Policy which would submit its report soon," she said. Besides, a constitutional obligation, Bangladesh is committed to attaining its universal literacy objectives in international fora such as World Conference on Education for All, World Summit for Children and E-9 Summit.