

অবিক্ষেপ 11 SEP 1990

পঞ্চাশ

The Bangladesh Observer

UNESCO's plan to eradicate illiteracy

PARIS, Sept. 10:—The 42nd session of UNESCO's international conference on education, a major event of International Literacy Year, ended Saturday in Geneva with the adoption of a recommendation addressed to member states concerning the policies, strategies and operational programmes needed in the struggle against illiteracy during the next ten years, reports BSS.

The week-long conference organized by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education was attended by more than 600 delegates of 123 member states and representatives of international, intergovernmental and Non-governmental organizations. Some 80 delegations were headed by ministers or deputy ministers.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev sent a message to the conference in which he hoped that the event would occupy a place of its own among other efforts of the cultural community aiming at establishing democracy and humanism in international relations.

Literacy, states the recommendation forms the core of any process of education which aims at generating awareness, acumen and the concept of cultural identity and developing the critical faculties that offer a means of escape from the many forms of resignation born of ignorance. One of the essential steps to be taken in order to achieve time-bound literacy targets during the 1990s is to renew existing strategies, says the recommendation, which goes on to list several measures needed to do this. One is the drastic reduction of drop-out from primary school through effective guidance, consultation with parents and the local community, and the provision of midday meals and other incentives. Non-governmental and voluntary agencies in literacy work at different levels in trying to eliminate disparities between men and women, and between boys and girls in primary schooling. Any effective policy should be formulated in co-operation with women's organizations.

The involvement and participation of young people and adults in identifying basic learning needs is also stressed in the recommendation. Basic education programmes should be directly linked to the concerns of their daily life, and local communities should be encouraged to determine their own goals and responsibilities in concrete terms. The adopted text also tackle the issues of evaluation of learner's achievements, training of literacy teachers and other personnel, functional literacy and continuing education, as well as regional and international co-operation.

The closing date of the conference coincides with the 25th anniversary of International Literacy Day, celebrated on September 8. Pope John-Paul II and UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar sent messages to UNESCO on the occasion. Celebrations of the day included the presentation of UNESCO's international literacy prizes, awarded annually to organizations or individuals who have made a particularly meritorious and effective contribution to the struggle against illiteracy. The five prizes and seven honourable mentions were presented to the winners by UNESCO's Director-General Federation Mayor, who said that "each man and each woman who becomes educated" is a victory not only in the fight against ignorance, but also in the fight against poverty and destitution. This victory, he added, is that of millions of men and women-teachers, organizers, and all the others contributing to progress in literacy. "Our message," said Mr. Mayor, is one of encouragement and hope, a message for the respect of the dignity of all human beings. May it reach them in all their countries and in all their languages.

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