

## Mass literacy planned for all 68,000 villages

The government plans to set up mass literacy centres in all the 68,000 villages in the country in phases, Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar said in Dhaka on Friday, reports BSS.

The Education Minister said since the rate of literacy is very meagre—around 25 per cent—vigorous efforts have to be undertaken to turn the vast multitude of people into lettered human beings so that they can at least sign, write letters, read news papers and understand programmes in Radio and Television.

The Minister was inaugurating a seminar on "mass literacy" organised by Lions Club of Dhaka Progoti at a hotel in Dhaka. Educational Secretary Safiul Alam and UNICEF representative in

Bangladesh Mr Cole P Dodge were the special guests on the occasion.

Prof S M Saifuddin, Executive Director, Mass Literacy Programme, was the keynote Speaker at the seminar which was chaired by Mr Gautam Saha, President of the club.

Describing mass literacy as a massive affair, the Education Minister said the objective could be achieved only through gradual process. He said the government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has already embarked upon compulsory primary education from the first of January in the 64 districts of the country. He said initially one upazila was taken from each district for the programme, but later four upazilas

would be included, one each from four divisions.

Mr Sircar said if this year's performance is successful, two upazilas will be taken up next year and this way the number will increase. He said the government is hopeful that with the assistance of donors including UNICEF and cooperation of all literate persons the mass literacy programme will achieve its desired objective by the end of the decade.

The Education Minister said besides, 51 thousand primary schools, makhtabs and community centres throughout the country will be used as centres for spreading mass literacy. He urged the teachers and literate persons in the villages to involve themselves in the programme to raise the much needed literacy rate.

Mr Sircar lamented that the mass literacy programme initiated by late President Ziaur Rahman was abandoned by the autocratic regime. He said had the programme continued uninterrupted, the situation would have been completely different now. Eighty lakh people were lettered in 1980 under that literacy programme, he pointed out.

UNICEF representative Mr. Dodge said the key to reducing illiteracy lay with the universalization of primary schooling through both formal and non-formal basic education, using all possible means. He said although gross enrolment at primary level in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the region, only 35 per cent complete the cycle of primary education. "Therefore, very special attention, very special programmes and a very special emphasis must have to be given by the ministry of education to the regular attendance and completion of education of children currently enrolled," he added.