

Education ministers get together to wipe out illiteracy

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: Education Ministers of nine most populous countries began a three-day meeting here today in a bid to find out common strategies to remove illiteracy by the year 2000, reports BSS.

The Education Ministers, at the conference hosted by Indian and jointly sponsored by the UNESCO, UNICEF and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), explained how they were attaching importance to primary education in their efforts to

achieve the goal of making their countries free from the curse of illiteracy.

The Education Ministers' Conference was originally fashioned as a pre-summit meeting as the heads of state and government of the nine countries were expected to meet in a one-day summit on December 16. Now as for the Indian President Soeharto, no other heads of state or government are coming. The education ministers are likely to complete the summit representing nine countries.

As the ministers from the participating countries had deliberations, it emerged that they had many similar problems like the low rate of enrolment, high rate of drop out from the primary schools as well as the sheer number of schools age children who somehow could not afford to go to the schools and adult illiteracy.

Four years ago the nine countries met for the first time at Jomption in Thailand under the behest of the three UN agencies to face the challenge of

eradicating the problem of illiteracy.

Education Minister Barro, Valero of Mexico, The Minister of Education and Youth Development of Nigeria, Dryorchia Ayu of Nigeria, and the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for Social Welfare and Education Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali. The Minister of the host country is chairing the meeting.

The chiefs of the three sponsoring UN agencies, UNESCO Director General, Mr Federico Mayor, the UNICEF Executive Director, Mr James P Grant and

Minister of High Education and Scientific Research, Mr Javier Barro, Valero of Mexico, The Minister of Education and Youth Development of Nigeria, Dryorchia Ayu of Nigeria, and the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for Social Welfare and Education Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali. The Minister of the host country is chairing the meeting.

The chiefs of the three sponsoring UN agencies, UNESCO Director General, Mr Federico Mayor, the UNICEF Executive Director, Mr James P Grant and

the UNFPA Executive Director, Dr Nafis Sadik, are also attending the conference.

All the participating countries said that it was ironic that the nine populous countries, once cradles of civilisation and learning gradually for historical reasons turned out to be the homes of the world's largest concentration of the illiterates as estimates indicate that over 75 per cent of the world's unlettered people live in these countries.

The participating countries

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Education ministers

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as well as the UN agencies stressed the need for cooperation among the nine countries as well as support from the international community to free the countries from illiteracy by the end of the century.

The Bangladesh Minister explained the problems of illiteracy in his country as well as the on going efforts to free the country of illiteracy by the end

of the century.

The Bangladesh government, he said, has recently introduced an experimental basis a programme of 'Food For Education' for the primary schools to attract the schools children of poor parents. He said this programme could be nationally introduced depending on its success in attracting the school age children to schools as well as on solving the problem of drop-outs.

Mr Jamiruddin Sirceer said that to draw more girls to the schools tuition fees have been waived for the girl students up to class eight. He said this was one of the several other measures to develop an education system free of gender discrimination.

The Education Minister said that education as a whole and primary education in particular "Are now areas of priority for allocation in the national budget."

The allocation to the education sector this year, he said, is the highest in the national budget of which 50 per cent has again been allocated to the primary education Sub-sector.

He said that recently the responsibility of primary and non-formal education was taken directly under the Prime Minister's office.

He said that to emphasise the importance of primary education the Bangladesh Government has recently bifurcated the Ministry of Education by constituting a whole new division with the responsibility of the fast expanding primary education system.

The Education Minister said that Bangladesh would need 4.7 billion dollars to meet its programmes for education and mass education from this year up to the end of the century. He said that here in particular international cooperation would be both relevant and necessary. He said that the international community ought to provide 2.2 billion dollars out of the total requirement of 4.7 billion dollars.