

# Our children are in school But can they read?

SHAHIDUL ISLAM and JOHN RICHARDS

**B**ANGLADESH can celebrate the International Literacy Day with pride. Since 2000, we have significantly increased enrolment and now nearly all children of an age to be in an early primary grade are in school. Everyone—parents, teachers, officials and political leaders—can take credit for this achievement. But enrolment is not enough. Can our children read?

Bangladesh is unfortunately a major contributor to the global total of some 250 million children who cannot read.

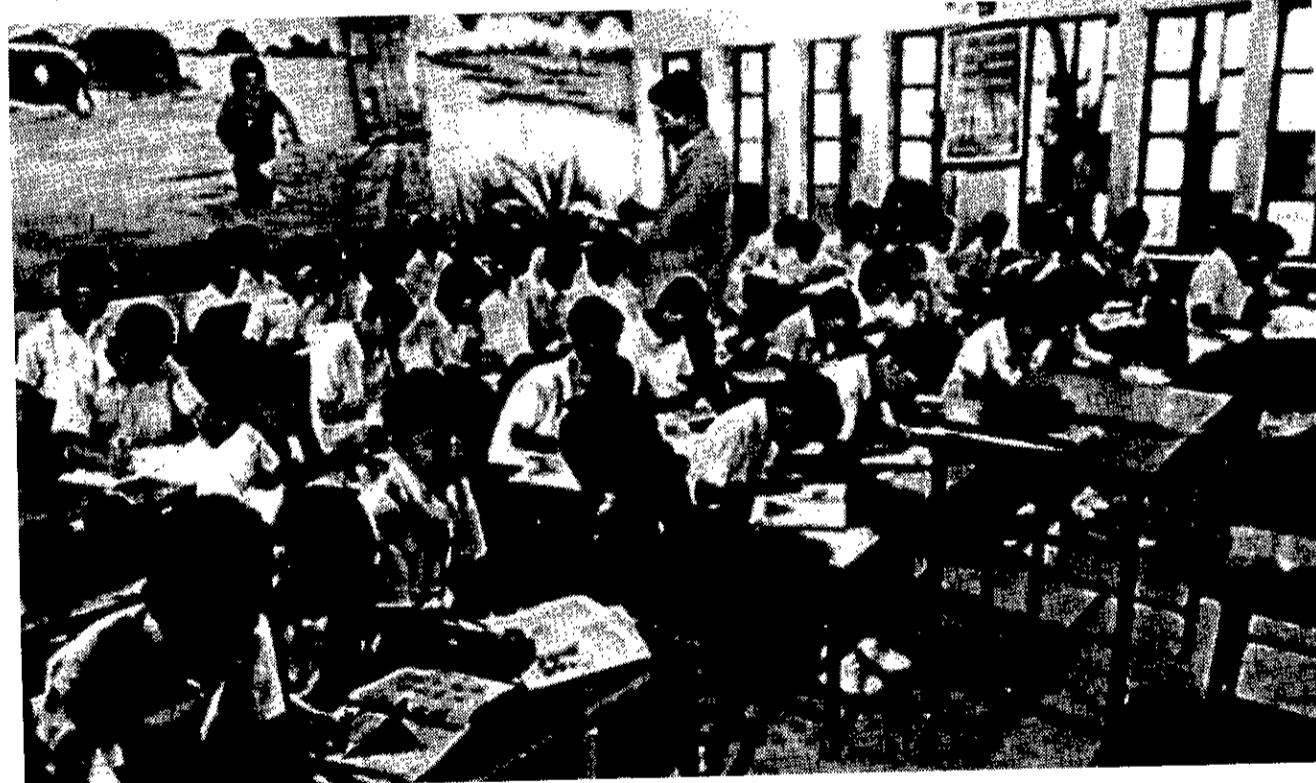
Unfortunately, the country's education officials seem content to continue "business as usual." Given these assessments, however, this is not a time for business as usual.

We should not try to make the problem disappear by adopting an unrealistically low benchmark for literacy. Proven early grade reading interventions are available to tackle reading problems. Literacy is ideally conceived as a continuum—from the ability to read road signs in Dhaka to the ability to read Tagore. However, managing school systems requires use of

big advantage over those countries, such as India, where multiple languages are spoken.

Capitalising on the fact that we have one primary language, we can easily adopt better teaching techniques for reading. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board has been working hard to introduce supplementary reading materials in primary grades. It is important to note here though, the supplementary reading materials must match children's reading levels.

We lack two important elements essential for improving children's



non-readers. ASER survey school students to read grade two curriculum 1

The literacy benchmark with EGRA is reading f by the number of words per minute. EGRA is al reading diagnostic tool use in their classrooms over a nationally repre of early primary grade assessments are of imr adopting better readin

World-renowned re Abadzi suggests readir minute as a threshold primary grades. Some Bangladesh that work school students follow while others use differ Unfortunately, no age number, tested by em confidently claim that particular fluency gu will be able to read w There is a role for the Bangladesh to determ literacy or reading be Bangla reader. This be be so low as to imply required to become li be so high as to impl reach high school lev school. Settling on ar fluency benchmark w assessing various read Of course, the fluenc children with disabil different.

Currently, the Mir Mass Education is de primary education d programme, for the t starting in 2018. It is for the country to de appropriate literacy l primary grade childr commitment that by primary education p graduating primary be able to meet, or p this level.

Shahidul Islam is Senior F Bangladesh. John Richard Fraser University, Vancouver expressed in this column the views of the United S International Development States Government.

Over the last two decades, all governments in Bangladesh have given education the highest priority in planning and budgeting exercises. Despite our efforts, adult literacy hovers around 60 percent, and this includes Bangladeshi whose level of literacy is minimal. They can write their names perhaps, but not much more. Using both national and local surveys, assessments of primary students indicate that at grade five no more than one quarter of children can reasonably be classified as able to read "at grade level."

administratively simple criteria that establish acceptable benchmarks at different grades. Without such benchmarks there is always a danger of lowering expectations to the point that children graduate from primary school not able to read and write as adults.

Bangladesh is admittedly faring better than many countries where 50 percent of children cannot read a single word after several years of schooling, partly due to the lack of teaching materials. In planning to improve literacy among Bangladeshi children, the country has a

reading skills—adequate teaching time and testing. Let's not confuse testing with our existing public examinations. More time needs to be devoted to the teaching of reading in early primary grades. Children also need more practice in reading, guided by their peers or teachers. In order to measure the results of teaching activities, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) provides a measure in terms of reading fluency. There are tools to assess reading ability. For instance, ASER in India is a highly popular tool for identifying readers and

চীফ পরিসংখ্যান বিভাগ
চীফ টি.এল.পি. বিভাগ
বিসেম এনালিস্ট
সিস্টেম ম্যানেজার
প্রশাসনিক কর্মকর্তা
বি.এস.সি.সি.
কর্মকর্তা/অভিযোগ

স্বাক্ষর