

The Bangladesh Times

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Authorities in development economics maintain that overall development of a society is crucially linked with the rate of literacy. They hold that everything from socio-economic underdevelopment to over-population, malnutrition and mass deprivation is invariably associated with illiteracy. No wonder then that the scourge of illiteracy plagues the underdeveloped and developing countries like Bangladesh.

Development strategies, globally as well as nationally, stress now-a-days on improving quality of life. We, in Bangladesh, have also adopted this goal. The success of this strategy of development is totally dependant on one big factor—an educated citizenry. Amartya Sen in his series of lectures on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the BIDS elaborately discussed this point.

We, in the poor, developing countries, are caught in a vicious circle: we are poor because we lack education; and we are failing in the literacy movement because we are poor and are unable or unwilling to make the necessary investment in education. Every country in the Third World is aware of this situation and adopts various strategies and tactics to increase the rate of literacy with varying degrees of success.

Key to literacy lies in primary education. This knowledge is universal. And, like all such universal truth, its application on the ground is not easy at all and demands highly determined and strenuous efforts. Universal primary education—that too compulsory—has remained a cherished goal with us since the British quit the Subcontinent. Not only that. It is a constitutional commitment for our Bangladesh.

The percentage of enrolment of the school-going children in primary schools is the surest yardstick to judge the success of any literacy movement. The rate of dropout is also an important factor. We have in place programmes both for increasing the percentage of enrolment in primary schools and also to combat the problem of dropout.

This newspaper carried a report in its Sunday's issue on the enrolment of students in the primary schools. Based on official sources and data, it has been reported that enrolment in primary schools is increasing every year and it may exceed the target of 70 per cent by 1990. According to official statistics, 58 per cent of the children between six and ten years of age were enrolled in primary schools in 1985. In 1986, the percentage was 64 and in 1987, it rose to 69. In 1988, a total of 1.12 crore children were enrolled as against 1.60 crore school-age children in the country. It has been noted that the ratio of girl students to that of boys is also on the increase.

These are encouraging news midway the perspective plan for Universal Primary Education, 1985-2001. It has, however, been observed that the progress of the UPE is being hindered by procedural delay, outside interference and lack of sincerity. We believe that the authorities concerned will remove all such hindrances and do everything necessary for the success of the UPE.



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