

Mass literacy drive must be turned into movement

By A Staff Reporter

The necessity to turning the mass-literacy drive into a national movement by mobilising the services of all educated people of the country was emphasised at the workshop on "removal of illiteracy from Bangladesh by 1985" on Monday.

The participants at the seminar dwelt on the shortcomings of the drive experienced during past two years. There was a consensus of opinion that despite two years of efforts the drive was yet to evoke desired level of response from either the illiterates or the literates.

They called for further rationalisation and strengthening of the organisational support to the programme. Suggestions in this regard varied from formation of a national advisory council for mass-literacy, to all-party literacy committees at all levels.

Some participants called for integrating the drive with some other activities like formation of cooperatives by new literates, so that those who acquire literacy also get some economic benefits through such cooperatives.

Some other suggested that the participation in the programme by educated people be made compulsory, after streamlining the channels through which they are to proceed.

During the course of discussion, the question of strengthening the effort for achieving compulsory universal free primary education by 1985 also came up. And some of the participants were of the opinion that a major portion of the population who are illiterates would be covered if that plan became a reality.

Two papers were presented at Monday's two sessions of the workshop by Mr Ferdous Khan, former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Mr Md Osman Ghani, Secretary General, Bangladesh Literacy Society.

In his paper Mr Ferdous Khan the number of people who have read at least upto class-VI was 33.5 lakh, including about 11 lakh who read upto class IX or above. There were three lakh teachers in the country. If the cooperation of even 18 lakh of the educated people was available achievement of mass-literacy in the shortest time was possible.

EDUCATED MUST PARTICIPATE

Mr Ferdous Khan said it would be enough, if the educated people participated in the programme for six consecutive weeks a year in their respective areas. There should be some sort of compulsion, alongside the effort to imbue them with

the enthusiasm for freeing the country from the curse of illiteracy, he said.

He called for making the illiterates aware of the bad effects of illiteracy on their own lives so that they were eager to acquire literacy; and emphasised the need for strong publicity through the mass media for the purpose.

Meanwhile, Mr Khan cautioned against employing the educated people to the task of removing illiteracy without giving them necessary guidance and training. Untrained literacy workers may fail to follow the required method of teaching and diminish the interests of the of illiterates for acquiring literacy.

He called for continuous research and evaluation works to bring out improved literacy books, and for supplying new literates reading materials so that they could retain their newly acquired knowledge.

Dr. Khan called for employing two full-time literacy workers at the union level, who would not only train other literacy workers; but also hold literacy classes throughout the year.

The morning session, presided over by Mr Abdur Razzak,

Director General, Primary and Mass-Education Directorate, was addressed by Dr. Obaidullah and Messrs Abul Kahem Sandwip, Mr Abdul Quddus, Kazi Siraj, Kabir Majumder, Dr Delwar Hossain and Abdul Kader Mia among others.

Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley, former Director of Social Welfare; was the chief guest at the afternoon session which was presided over by Mr Abdur Rashid Chowdhury, Secretary, Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO.

PROPER COORDINATION

In his paper Mr Md Osman Ghani, Secretary General, Bangladesh Literacy Society, called for proper coordination of the non-government efforts at achieving mass literacy by forming an independent and powerful coordinating body.

Mr Ghani also called for asking all voluntary organisations and agencies operating in Bangladesh to participate in the mass-literacy programme.

Dr. Mizanur Rahman Shelley called for identifying the causes of the past mistakes. He also called for giving due attention to the fact that enthusi-

asm for literacy could not be created and sustained if the number of educated unemployed continued to increase.

Dr Shelley stressed the need for creating national awareness about the bad effects of illiteracy before going all-out for the mass-literacy drive. The drive should also not suffer from red-tapism, he added.

Those who participated in the discussion of the afternoon session were: Dr Delwar Hossain and Messrs Asoke Chowdhury, Jashimuddin Ahmed, and Matiur Rahman among others.