

Political will key to literacy: Ershad

JOMTIEN (Thailand), Mar. 5.— President Hussain Muhammad Ershad today called for mobilising political will in the world as well as global resources for world-wide universalisation of education, reports BSS.

Addressing the opening session of the five-day world conference on education for all as an especially invited guest at the convention hall of Ambassador City Jomtien hotel here, the President said, let us make the best possible use of this historic assembly and at the same time let us not miss this opportunity of the century".

The conference sponsored by UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank and several other associate organisations and the Government of Thailand was inaugurated by Princess Maha Chakri Sirimahorn of Thailand. UNESCO Director General Dr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza spoke on the occasion.

President Ershad addressed the opening session on a joint invitation from the heads of four UN bodies—UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the

World Bank. President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and President Rodrigo Borja Ceballos of Ecuador also addressed the opening session. President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives will address the conference on March 7.

An eight-member Bangladesh delegation headed by Education Minister Sheikh Shahidul Islam is attending the conference.

The conference, first of its kind is being participated by about 1500 delegates from 165 countries as well as UN bodies and their associates.

President Ershad had earlier informally met the Presidents of Kenya and Ecuador, Princess Sirimdhorn of Thailand and heads of UN bodies sponsoring the conference.

President Ershad made a fervent appeal, on behalf of those peoples who were still suffering most from the darkness of illiteracy and ignorance to make the best possible use of this historic assembly.

He expressed deep satisfaction that in the field of literacy and education the world as a whole had

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Political will

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woken up to the need for united and concerted global action. He said the urgency of such an action could not be over-emphasised when millions of children had no chance of schooling and their number had been increasing day by day. Nearly a billion people in the world cannot read or write, he pointed out.

President Ershad said the curse of illiteracy and lack of basic education haunt the entire world in spite of the fact that the immense advances had been made in the fields of science and technology. The failure might very well be ascribed to the lack of united and resolute will and systematic programmes on both national and global levels, he said.

Emphasising the need for correcting the mistakes and negligence of the yesteryears, he said urgent measures needed to be taken to build up a brave new alliance of new effective partners on global dimension as well as within each nation.

Strength of social forces

The President said the strength of social forces and hitherto untapped energy of organisations and human groups needed to secure education for all within the shortest possible time. Without empowerment of every individual with literacy and basic education. The dream of a prosperous and equitable world in the twenty-first century could not be realised nor the noble aim of securing for all a basic human right like education was possible, he said.

He said the conference was being held at a time of rich hope and unfolding promise. A new decade had begun with the prospects of a more peaceful and cooperative world, he said adding "a new century waits to welcome mankind into an age of prosperous and equitable peace". Dogmatism and rigidity were yielding to free thought and pragmatic flexibility while hostility and hatred, enmity and conflict were becoming outmoded, he said.

President Ershad said the new world promised to be largely one without tensions, contradictions and violent conflicts. In the present atmosphere, he said, the great powers were coming to a position where resources they would save by massive reduction of expenditure for military purpose might be diverted to education for the purpose of providing global economic and technology development.

He said it would be wise, in fact indispensable, for us to seize the hour and to seize the moment. The oppor-

tunities offered by a world in the throes of welcome change were virtually limitless, he said adding: let these opportunities be turned to good use of re-ensuring education for all.

Curse of illiteracy

The President referred to the steps taken by his Government for eradication of the curse of illiteracy from the society and said primary education was made compulsory and education upto grade 8 in the rural areas had been made free for girl students.

He said other steps included passage of legislation in the Parliament for implementation of these major decisions, and the setting up of Pathakali Trust to impart literacy and basic education as well as to provide minimum nutrition and health care.

President Ershad said the world conference on education for all was taking place at the appropriate moment of emerging hope and new confidence. "The confidence that we refer to is faith generated by hard and united work in noble cause—the cause is development of all mankind and redemption of humanity from the curse of dark illiteracy," he said.