

about it.

Removing Illiteracy

We are all aware that the path to progress is dependent on having an educated workforce. Education is the backbone of a country and we despair that, even after three decades of independence, a very large part of our population is unable to read or write. Of course the major complaint from those entrusted with the task of making the people literate is lack of money with which to do the job. In other words their efforts are constrained by the small annual budget allocated for the purpose. But apart from money—or the lack thereof—that all is not well with this sector is common knowledge.

However the government and non-government organisations have taken up several initiatives for the purpose which gives us some little hope of achieving our target by the year 2002. For example four million people are now getting their education from non-formal education schemes, and the success in this sector has been the inspiration for others to follow. Nevertheless, good as this may be, the claim for 51 per cent literacy rate, judging from empirical evidence, is far too high to be realistic. Even claims that certain areas such as Lalmonirhat, Chuadanga, Rajshahi and Magura have become totally literate bring smiles to people's lips for we live in the shadow of the knowledge that we have not been able to make more than the smallest dent in illiteracy.

This has been compounded by the arrival of modern information technologies for they have made the divide even wider. Obviously eradicating illiteracy is not as easy as we would like to believe yet in our hearts we know that it is possible to teach 34 million people how to read and write. After all it only a gateway to knowledge and not knowledge itself.

Records show that 2.34 million people have become literate under the country's literacy programmes, which means we still have a long way to go and only four years in which to do it if total literacy is to be acquired by 2002. What is lacking in the programme is full social mobilisation for without the participation of the literate, no programme can be effective. Everyone must take on the task of teaching someone within the vicinity if illiteracy is to be eradicated from the land.

Both formal and non-formal approaches are needed if the aim is to achieve total literacy by the year 2002. But with the cost of providing public education increasing with each passing year the government is under extreme pressure if it is to finance these programmes too. With so many forces at work to prevent us from reaching our goal, the important thing is not to give way to despair but to press on regardless and hope the snowball will in time, gather momentum.