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Education Is The Key

Total literacy of the kind achieved by South Korea has eluded every effort made by Bangladesh since its very inception. This has been the tragedy of this nation. Yet there was a time when this former province of East Pakistan was proud of its literacy rate and could boast it was better than that of the western wing. The standard of education was also higher, so with that as the background the effort to launch a new literacy programme for 35 lakh people in 64 districts of the country may be considered laudable.

With an estimated six crore people still in the darkness that illiteracy accounts for, the new approach must be both formal and non-formal if the aim is to achieve 62 per cent adult literacy rate by the year 2000, as spelled out in the Non-formal Primary Education Programme — no small order for a country that is still at the bottom rung of the development ladder and whose economic progress depends on educating the masses. However, as the cost of providing public education increases, the government is naturally under extreme pressure to provide it but with education a pre-requisite for development, they really have no choice but to find whatever resources needed for an undertaking of this size.

However with an approximate two million new mouths being added each year to the country's already burgeoning millions, finding enough funds to carry such a programme through will be increasingly difficult. With so many forces working against us, reaching our goal of universal education will not be easy and in fact the whole idea of universal education is beginning to wane. But as education plays a most vital role in the development of the economy, we cannot afford to leave any stone unturned. But to expect too much from a literacy programme may also be unrealistic.

All the economists believe unanimously that the economic value of education is immense for developing a competent society, increasing techno-conceptual and managerial skills and preparing them for facing change. If we care to learn from history, we will know that those states that achieved full literacy within the shortest possible time by concentrating their resources in this area spent an extraordinarily large proportion of their budgets on the designing of an education system with a modern and scientific outlook. In Japan, for example, nine years of schooling was made compulsory with the result that the country now has one of the best trained and highly motivated labour forces in the world, and Japan could become a super power. In other words, the most valuable capital a country can have is its human resource, always provided it is literate. Education undoubtedly is the cornerstone of development, an effective instrument for moving society forward. So if this new effort does all it is intended to do, then we could at last, be on the right track.

In September, when the world observed World Literacy Day it was under a shadow as we knew that, despite our best efforts, we were unable to improve much on our level of literacy. That eradicating illiteracy is not easy has been brought home to us over and over again in failed plans and programmes, although the records show that 2.34 million people have been reached under the literacy programmes of the Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE). Unless the masses are mobilised in support of the literacy campaign, it is no work any better than did previous ones. With many schools lacking trained teachers and with ten privy access to education for the simple no schools for them to attend, nothing short on is needed if we are to achieve our ends.