

LITERACY RATE Estimates of minister, BBS contradict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Primary and Mass Education Minister Afsarul Ameen yesterday said though the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) stated that the country's literacy rate at present is 59.8 percent, as per the ministry's estimation, it is 71 percent.

However, he could not explain how the ministry came up with the estimation. Confusion arose over the literacy rate in 2011 when the minister, the former secretary to the ministry and the former Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE) chief claimed that the percentage was 58, 54 and 53 respectively.

"The rate has increased due to several government initiatives," he told a press conference the ministry organised at its premises in the capital marking International Literacy Day 2013, to be observed on Sunday.

The day's theme this year is "We will

become literate and efficient: This is our aim in the 21st century".

The government hopes to nearly fulfil its electoral pledge of eradicating illiteracy by 2014, provided the ministry gets approval of the projects taken in this regard, he said.

He said the literacy rate would have increased further if the BNP-led four-party alliance had not closed the BNFE for five years since 2001.

"The literacy rate went up to 62 percent during the previous Awami League tenure from 1996 to 2001 but it came down to 52 percent during the BNP government tenure when the bureau was shut," he said.

Afsarul said a "Basic Literacy Project (64 districts)", through which the BNFE would make 45 lakh people, aged between 11 and 45, literate, was awaiting approval.

The primary level dropout rate has come down to 29 percent, he added.