

Two-thirds slum dwellers not literate

Govt set to miss MDG goal

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THE International Literacy Day will be observed on Tuesday in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world, while the literacy rate is

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33 per cent in slums, 69 per cent in urban areas and 57 per cent in rural areas in the country.

The government is also set to miss the Millennium Development Goal of 100 per cent literacy by 2015.

The government had already missed the target of illiteracy eradication by 2014, as set out in the National Education Policy 2010, the Sixth Five-Year Plan and the election pledge of the ruling Awami League when it won the 2008 general elections.

Experts and primary and mass education officials said that the government missed the targets as it took up no project to address illiteracy through the Bureau of Non Formal Education in the past five/six years.

Faulty designs and irregularities in the projects taken earlier also contributed to the failure to achieve the targets, they said.

According to them, lack of proper strategies and projects for slum dwellers and socio-economic disparity were the major reasons behind the poor literacy rates in the slums.

Primary and mass education minister Mostafizur

Rahman admitted that the literacy rate in slums was lower than that of other urban areas.

He said that government was implementing the second phase of Reaching Out-of-School Children project aiming at reducing the number of out-of-school children in the country including slums.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Report on Sample Vital Registration System 2013, came out in June, said that literacy rate of population of 7+ years in urban areas was 68.6 per cent. The report on Slum Areas and Floating Population 2014, came out in the same month, said that 33.26 per cent population in slums in divisional headquarters were literate.

About 22.32 lakh people live in 13,943 slums, the census report said. Slum dwellers constitute 6.33 per cent of the country's urban population.

The government is set to miss the Millennium Development Goal of eradication of adult illiteracy by 2015.

The minister said that 61 per cent people aged 15 years and above were literate in the country.

A top primary and mass

education official said that the government had failed to take up any project to address illiteracy since 2009. 'There has been no project after the Total Literacy Movement targeting eradication of illiteracy,' the official said.

Bureau of Non Formal Education officials admitted that the government had not taken up any project to address illiteracy. Other programmes for skill development of the literate were, however, implemented by the bureau in the recent years.

The government is at preparation level to implement a Tk 452 crore Basic Literacy Project to reach 45 lakh people aged 15 to 45 years by June 2018 at its own expense for eradication of illiteracy, said Mostafizur Rahman.

The last project to address illiteracy, Total Literacy Movement, which started in 1996, drew widespread allegations of irregularities, discouraging donors to support such projects ever since, experts said.

Campaign for Popular Education executive director Rasheda K Choudhury and BRAC University professor emeritus Manzoor Ahmed

said that faulty designs and irregularities in the projects caused the government to miss the targets.

Rasheda said, 'The Awami League in its election manifesto pledged to eliminate illiteracy by 2014, but the government had taken up no well-meaning plans and strategies and made no sufficient investments in implementing the target.'

She alleged that the projects lacked proper strategies and suffered from faulty designs and irregularities.

She said that socio-economic condition, absence of government and non-government investment and programmes targeting slum dwellers, inadequacy of proper school facilities in slum areas were major reasons for lower literacy rate in slums.

The minister also blamed socio-economic condition of the slum areas for lower literacy rate.

He said that illiteracy, could not be eradicated overnight. 'After MDG, we will move to Sustainable Development Goals and give priority to the issue of literacy.'

The government will do its best to address the literacy issue, he said.