

Mass Education Remains Illusive

by Mostafa Kamal Majumder

The Mass Education Programme of the government is progressing at a snail's pace. If the trend continues the target of achieving education for all by the year 2000 will remain as illusive as before, say experts.

The Mass Education Programme first taken up in 1980-81 remained suspended from 1982 following the take over of power. In 1988 it was taken up again as a pilot project with the aim of opening 60 literacy centres in each of the 460 upazilas by the end of 1990.

So far the programme could be expanded to only 27 upazilas, and project officials say, in the last two years only one lakh people could be made literate. Steps are now underway to turn another fifty lakh people into literates by the end of the Fourth Five-Year Plan period (1991-95).

Reliable source say, the previous government appeared to be too much obsessed with the plan for compulsory primary education that it paid little attention to mass education. They underestimated the importance of eradication of illiteracy.

Says an expert, development messages transmitted by different agencies on important things like immunisation, malnutrition, family planning, balanced food, sanitation and cleanliness simply do not reach those who cannot read and write. Communication plays an important role to ensure people's participation in development programmes. 'Illiterates are only the listeners in the communication process, not participants', and their effective participation in development activities thus remains out of question, he says.

Mass illiteracy is also bound to affect the governments compulsory primary education plan, because illiterate parents cannot be expected to understand its importance, the expert adds.

Official statistics show that at present there are 9.1 crore illiterates out of a total population of 11.5 crore. The percentage of literacy is 29.8 among the population of 15 years and above, and 26.2 per cent among those who are five years and above.

An estimated 2.3 lakh illit-

erates are now in the most active age group of 15 to 35 years. Their number is expected to swell to 2.6 crore by 1995. The Government's target to make another fifty million people literate by 1995 is thus a 'small drop of water in a mighty ocean'.

The pilot Mass Education Project started in February, 1988 is now continuing as a 'spill-over' project of the Third Five-Year Plan period. The failure of the project to attain its objective of opening 60 literacy centres each in the 460 upazilas is attributed to faults in the project design itself. It is said that the project called for expansion of mass education by relying on upazila education officers who were under no obligation to work for its success. The project had no district or upazila level setup. The 1987 and 1988 floods are also said to have affected the implementation of the programme because the effects of the floods were felt even by the end of 1989. Taka 26.24 crore earmarked for the project could not be disbursed in time.

However, it is also alleged

that the project had to face obstructions from mid-level government officials. Even recommendations from an education minister were of no help for its expansion. By the end of 1989 the then education minister had ordered the expansion of the Mass Education Project to another 38 upazilas. On the plea of evaluation of the project activities in 27 upazilas the initiative was brought to a halt. By January 1990 an evaluation committee was also formed. A year has passed since then. But no evaluation report has been prepared. It is gathered that recently an order has been passed to expand the Mass Education Programme in another 15 upazilas immediately.

The authorities concerned are now busy preparing a plan to open 100 literacy centres in each of the 460 upazilas in the next four years of the Fourth Five-Year Plan period at this pace only slightly more than crore people can be freed from the curse of illiteracy by the turn of the century. But by then the number of illiterates in the age group of 15 to 44

years is likely to be above five crore.

The change of power in March, 1982, was followed by demolition of all structures created by the previous government with the objective of freeing four crore people from the curse of illiteracy by 1985. By 1981-82 the Directorate of Public Instructions was bifurcated to create an independent Directorate of Primary and Mass Education and another Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education. One Additional Deputy Commissioner (Literacy) was appointed in each of the 22 old districts. Participation of secondary and higher secondary level students in the programme was made compulsory.

The Mass Education Programme of the early eighties had many defects. It was not well planned, and preparations were not adequate. But this did not justify its eventual elimination. The present exercises are also highly inadequate. Educationists can only hope that the next political government will put it back to full gear. Otherwise education for all can not be achieved by the year 2000.



A literacy class of adult women in Bangladesh

Primary Education: Period-length Can Make or Mar Quality

Zakaria Siraji

Altaf Hossain, the headmaster of a primary school, is an aged man. He is due to retire soon. I was talking to him in his village school called Gobindapur Fazil Ghat Govt. Primary school in Dagon Bhuya Upazila (sub-district) in Feni, about 90 miles from the capital. After a long career in teaching, he has come to the end of his service life. There is a touch of fatigue in his face. He loved teaching and never considered the idea of taking up any other job. As he prepares to say goodbye to teaching, he feels sad as well as joyous. His sadness is not only because he is leaving behind his students and teaching but also because the state of primary education is disconcerting and on the whole shows no sign of improvement. Three-fourths of the total population are illiterate. Of the 12.5 million children of school going age 6.6 million go to school and of them 78 per cent drop out before completing primary education. But there is also a surge of cheerfulness as he leaves.

In the past few years, he and some of his colleagues in the other schools of the area have given trial to certain modifications and improvements in the teaching methods and they think that if these methodological improvements are consolidated, some of the main obstacles to the spread of primary education will be removed. And no cost is involved in it. In evolving this method, they were assisted by a non-government research organisation on primary education called Bidyalaya Kendrik Shikhya Samity (Committee for School-Based Education). The government gave no objection according to Altaf Hossain, after the new method was introduced, drop out rate has fallen, it has been possible to monitor pupils' progress and make evaluation and pupils are showing greater interest in their studies. Most of all, this makes it possible for lessons to be completed in the class room sparing the pupils the

need to depend on private tutor or to study at home on their own.

In the traditional method, it was rarely possible to complete a lesson in the classroom, and huge burden of homework had to be given. This had been the biggest handicap for the poor boys and girls in village. Not many households of the poor could afford the right kind of atmosphere for them to prepare their lessons attentively. Mostly in poor families parents are uneducated and unable to help their children with their studies. And a private tutor is out of the question. The above named 'research group' conducted a survey which revealed that 74 per cent parents are uneducated, 8 per cent are too insufficiently educated to help and 4 per cent cannot help due to their normal pre-occupations.

Pupils become loggards, start falling behind, especially those that are most underprivileged. Each period lasts for 30 minutes. It takes five minutes for the teacher to leave a class room and enter another and settle himself. Then a few minutes are taken up in introductory talks and exchanges which too are necessary. (The first period is of 35 minutes but roll takes up the extra minutes). Then revision, giving new lessons, class work, examining scripts and in the mean time the bell is rung. No time was available to ascertain comprehension, not to speak of individual evaluation. 'The rest of the lesson you learn at home', saying this the teacher has left for another class. The new period begins. This also ends with instructions for home work. The teacher has been saying things that carries no meaning for the pupil. And during the time the teacher is examining scripts, the pupil is either gossiping or letting his mind wander. He keeps falling behind, loses interest and mental dropout starts from then on. Finally one day he stops coming to school. This is the picture of primary education as far as the poor underprivileged children in

villages are concerned. If progress of every student could be ascertained during school time and new lesson could be thoroughly taught, the poor and underprivileged boys and girls would not have fallen behind on account of their unfavourable family situation. But a 30 minute period cannot permit that, especially when teacher student ratio is 1 to 54 and even more adverse in the lower classes. What is to be done? From this thought flows the impulse for the School-Based Education Project. With the cooperation of the sponsors of the project, the committee for school based education, the education department of the government and some other organisations a few school, are implementing this project.

The project has low aspects. One- extending the length of each period from 30 minutes to one hour. (Keeping the total school-time intact). Two - naming a few group leaders among pupils, selected everyday on the basis of good performance who will help their classmates with the studies. This fosters team spirit among children from early life also creates a healthy competitiveness among them, since group leader is named every day anew from among those who have best mastered their lesson. Also, every student participates in studies despite adverse teacher-student ratio, utilisation of time is also maximised as learning goes on by the students themselves while the teacher is examining scripts.

Extension of period length to one hour does not, it is true, enhance the total time a pupil spends at school but it vastly facilitates the completion of studies within school time. Those who are following the new schedule are all agreed on it - teachers, pupils, even government inspectors. This is an improvement in many ways. The teacher finds time to complete a lesson in the class, ascertain comprehension and evaluate each student. I asked Mahmuda Begum a teacher of the school, how she spends one hour under the new rou-

time and what benefit it yields. She replied she spends roughly 15 minutes on revision, 20 minutes on new lesson, another 15 minutes on class work, group work and examining scripts after which she is left with another few minutes to ascertain comprehension and evaluate. Tanvir Ahmed Siddique, a student of class V said he prefers one-hour-period. I entered the class room. The teacher was examining scripts and two group leaders were assisting class mates

In a village a few miles away, there is another school called Madhyam Purbo Charkakra, non-government primary school. This is a non-government school and facilities are very scanty. The

The government school inspector of the area, Mr. school has 4 teachers and a roll of 250 students. But dropout rate is zero and every pupil passes in the annual examination. The headmaster, Kamaluddin said, for the last few years they have been following school-based education method, that is, a period length of one hour. He showed me the attendance register of the day. The attendance was very satisfactory. A teacher said as he has one hour now he spends 10 minutes for revision, 30 minutes for new lesson and the rest 20 minutes for exercises and evaluation. Latfar Rahman said in the schools within his jurisdiction, one-hour periods are followed. He is noticing significant improvement in the 20 primary school of the area which he has to inspect twice a month. Ibrahim Sobhan, of the sponsors of this improved methodology and the Principal Director of the non-government research group School-Based Education Samity, said they interviewed 965 headmasters on the question of whom 90.50 per cent were in favour of one-hour periods. He hopes slowly all the primary schools of the country will switch over to this methodology. — Devfeature

Gulf crisis

Perez a dirty criminal, conspirator: Iraq

NICOSIA, Feb 15: Iraq's information minister blamed UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar Thursday as a 'dirty criminal' who no longer deserved his title, reports AFP.

"Iraq is not surprised by the conspiratorial role played by the UN Secretary General in this war that pits Iraq against US imperialism, the Zionists and their allies," said Latif Nassif Jasseem, as quoted by the official Iraqi news agency.

The statement followed an Allied air raid Wednesday on a Baghdad bomb shelter that killed scores of civilians. Allied officials insist the shelter was a legitimate target, used by the Iraqi military as a command and control post.

The attack on the UN chief also came after the Security Council, meeting formally for

the first time since the Gulf war began January 17, decided to debate the conflict in a rare closed-door session.

"By his behaviour, Perez de Cuellar has confirmed he is a dirty criminal and a conspirator who has played his role in a hypocritical and discreet manner," Mr. Jasseem said, describing him as "dishonest and incompetent".

"On top of his silence in the face of crimes committed by the Americans and their allies, he provided cover for the United States when he came to Baghdad and then made hypocritical remarks that spurred the outbreak of hostilities.

"For these reasons, Perez de Cuellar, from a legal and ethical point of view, does not deserve his title", he said

Execution of 200 Kuwaitis claimed

RIYADH Feb 15: Iraqi forces have executed more than 200 Kuwaitis since the Gulf war broke out last month, including 65 put to death last week for subversion, a Kuwaiti Air Force colonel said in Riyadh Thursday, reports AFP.

Col. Abdullah El Kandari made his remarks while presenting a clandestine video by the Kuwaiti resistance alleging repeated atrocities by Baghdad's troops.

Col. El Kandari quoted reports from within Kuwait that said 65 men and women had been executed by the Iraqis in a recent four-day period, among them 12 people whose throats were slit and heads cut off.

"Their corpses were then placed in front of their homes and were left for 36 hours from others to see," the colonel said. He said the deaths brought the overall toll since the war began January 17 to more than 200.

There was no independent confirmation of the reports.

The air officer said the resistance had been doing its best with "limited resources" to help chase out the Iraqis who invaded on August 2. He said resistance fighters had been told to take no action

since the war began because of the "high risk."

Col. El Kandari said that communications with the resistance in Kuwait were cut off about one week ago after Iraqi troops seized satellite and other equipment.

The Colonel presented a grainy video taken January 5 which showed Iraqi troops and anti-aircraft artillery batteries on top of a school in a town in southern Kuwait.

He also alleged new horrors against Kuwaitis at the hands of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's men, including beatings of prisoners, rape, prostitution and selling alcohol beside mosques.

"This man is a brutal dictator who only believes himself and his brutal regime," said an unidentified resistance fighter on the tape.

Col. El Kandari said the damage inflicted on Iraq by four weeks of Allied bombing had shifted the focus of the media from the suffering in his occupied country.

"Saddam Hussein is allowing controlled reports to come out of Baghdad, but no photos or reports whatsoever have come out of Kuwait since the August 2 invasion," he said.

in a dispatch monitored here.

The UN Secretary General made a last-minute visit to the Iraqi capital before a Security Council deadline of 0500 GMT January 16 for Iraqi troops to withdraw from Kuwait.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz on Wednesday urged the UN chief to "personally" condemn the alleged bombardment of the bomb shelter.

He said almost 400 civilians, mostly women, children and the elderly, had been taking refuge in the shelter when it was destroyed. "Covering up such crimes will be a mark of disgrace for the United Nations," Mr Aziz said.

The Foreign Minister blamed the high loss of Iraqi civilian lives on the countries that adopted UN Security Council resolution 678 endorsing the use of force against Iraq.

The UN Secretary General has expressed "profound regrets" over the reports of the attack.

"While he does not have full details about the circumstances of this tragic incident, he is nonetheless dismayed by the magnitude of the casualties," Francois Gulliani, the UN chief's spokesman, said Wednesday in New York.

Speaking at the 39-nation UN sponsored conference on disarmament, he called for Iraq's total and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait but added: "the situation in the Persian Gulf is getting out of hand."

"The crisis which was initiated by Iraq's occupation of Kuwait and exacerbated by the unprecedented and massive foreign military buildup in the region with objectives that go beyond the liberation of Kuwait has now entered the fifth week of an all-out war with no apparent end in sight," he said.

Gulf situation getting out of hand: Iran

GENEVA, Feb 15: Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati on Thursday accused the coalition fighting Iraq of pursuing objectives beyond the liberation of Kuwait, reports Reuters.

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Chemical weapons a 20th century nightmare

BRUSSELS, Feb 15: Sometimes known as the "poor man's atomic bomb," chemical weapons have haunted many wars this century, reports Reuters.

"... Watch the white eyes writhing in his face, His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin; If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs..."

Thus wrote British poet Wilfred Owen of a poison gas victim in World War I. Unpredictable, insidious, often undetectable until it is too late, chemical weapons can bring death in minutes or stretch the agony into hours.

They make no distinction of friend or foe, soldier or civilian.

Next week, with a grim irony that Owen would have appreciated, 40 nations will meet in Geneva to formally resume the UN-sponsored conference on disarmament. Their top priority is to agree a global ban on the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons.

Iraq, which used chemical weapons in its war against Iran and has repeatedly threatened to unleash them in a Gulf war, will also be there as an observer.

It was the use of chemical weapons during World War I, in which chlorine and mustard gas killed almost 100,000 men and injured more than one million, that led to a ban on their use in a 1925 Geneva protocol.

Chemical agents were used rarely during World War II. But the Cold War saw NATO and the Warsaw Pact stockpile large amounts.

Their use in the Iran-Iraq war gave new urgency to UN efforts for a global ban on production and stockpiling efforts that have now dragged on for 23 years.

Who has chemical weapons? How do they work? How useful are they in military terms? And what defence exists against them?

Only Iraq, the Soviet Union and the United States admit possessing them, although the world's intelligence community believes the unofficial list is much longer—some 20 countries, including France, China, Libya, Iran and Israel.

"The trouble is that it really takes not much more than elementary chemistry to make crude chemical weapons," said one NATO military official with knowledge of the subject. "It can be a very cheap form of deterrence."

Take mustard gas. A basic ingredient is thiodiglycol, a common chemical used, among other things, to make ballpoint pens flow freely or transfer bright colours into fabrics. Add hydrochloric acid and you have mustard gas.

The more important question is how chemical weapons are delivered at targets. A crude gas delivered by an accurate missile is more effective than a sophisticated gas launched in a haphazard way.

Agents can be fired in artillery shells, dropped from aircraft in bombs or packed into missile warheads.

Chemical weapons divide into two basic kinds, both of which Iraq could use in the Gulf war.

Blister agents: These include "mustard gas", named for its pungent smell. First used in World War I, they are still regarded as effective weapons and can linger for hours.

Delivered as oily liquid in fine droplets, blister agents inflict massive burns, particularly in the groin and armpits. If inhaled, they can strip the lungs and burn the throat, or cause permanent damage to sight and blood cells.

Nerve agents: The best-known types, Tabun and Sarin, were developed as pesticide in the 1930's by Germany's IG Farben, which later supplied

the Nazis with the Zyklon B used to gas the Jews. Nerve agents throw muscles into spasms, cause the pupils to contract and bring loss of bowel control. A drop the size of a pinhead can be fatal if it touches the skin.

Death can take between 15 minutes and two hours, although inhalation can mean loss of life in a few seconds. Many are odourless, but some smell of fruit or garlic.

Many nerve gases, including those in the US arsenal, are delivered in so-called binary systems. They consist of two chemicals, harmless in their separate compartments, which are mixed when the bomb or missile explodes to form a deadly compound.

In addition, there is hydrogen cyanide. Absorbed through breathing, it simply chokes the victim to death, usually in about 15 minutes. It disperses quickly.

The military value of chemical weapons can be devastating as a means of "softening up" enemy positions, decimating an enemy attack, or to contaminate terrain during a retreat.

Some disperse quickly, allowing friendly forces to move in. Others linger for hours, creating "no go" areas for both sides.

The trouble with chemical weapons is that they depend on the weather," said the NATO official. "If conditions are right, dry and not much

wind, they can be very useful". Rain or snow can diminish their effectiveness. Disaster can strike if the wind blows the wrong way, as it did in World War I when "friendly" trenches were gassed.

But, as a weapons of terror, chemical weapons can also be effective against civilian populations, a threat that Iraq's Saddam Hussein has made explicit to Israel.

Unless a country has large numbers of protective suits and masks for its people, there may be no place to hide. For those on the battlefield, such garments offer protection although they are cumbersome and make combat difficult.

Masks, with special filters, have to be fitted within seconds. The suits have small tapes that will change colour and warn of an attack by various kinds of agents.

Armoured vehicles can be sealed against chemical attacks, leaving the crew free to continue fighting. Special vehicles can help with decontamination.

There are also preventive tablets which may be taken by soldiers if they think a gas attack is imminent, or small injections as an antidote to nerve agents. But, as the NATO official put it:



SAUDI ARABIA: A Kuwait army volunteer has his chest walked on as part of his training February 12. The training course is for four weeks and involves instruction in the use of weapons, karate and drill. — AFP / UNB photo.

Hajj boycott call falls on deaf ears

NICOSIA, Feb 15: Iraq's call on Muslims to boycott this year's Hajj, to the holy sites in Saudi Arabia has apparently fallen on deaf ears, reports AFP.

But the Gulf war was left many Muslims wondering if it makes sense to travel to Mecca and Medina this June.

Iraqi Religious Endowments Minister Abdallah Fadel said Monday that Baghdad would boycott the Hajj in June and urged all the other Islamic countries to follow suit.

Under the American occupation the Hajj cannot be accomplished because the holy land is occupied by infidels. He said in reference to the deployment in Saudi Arabia of the

US led forces against Iraq. There was been no official response to his call from Muslim or Arab states, and no reaction from Saudi Arabia, where the Iraqi appear was either ignored or given a slight mention by the media.

Experts said this reaction could best be explained by the fact that in Islam the Hajj is seen as something between God and man in which the governments should not get involved.

In Indonesia the largest Islamic state with a population of 180 million Muslim would be pilgrims continued to sign-up at the government agency in charge of preparing for the Hajj.