

# 21st Century: A Better World or a "Brave New World"?

by Federico Mayor and Jerome Binde

**Bringing the benefits of globalisation to everyone was the objective of a recent G8-summit. This commitment must be made precisely and concretely, by using the dividends of peace to abolish the debt of the largest number of heavily indebted States from the year 2000 onwards, in order to enable Africa and other areas of the world, to make a new start.**

As we inch closer to the year 2000, our global future seems increasingly difficult to decipher. Can humanity survive the twenty-first century? We can't predict the future, but we can prepare for it. Ilya Prigogine once observed. However, are we ready for the twenty-first century? It is because we have our doubts about this that we decided to provide the international community with an instrument of observation: a future-oriented world report entitled *The World Ahead: Our Future in the Making*. Our idea was to attempt to answer a few simple questions. For example, are we really threatened by a demographic time bomb? Will there be enough to eat for everyone? Will it be possible to eradicate poverty? Are we heading for widespread urban and social apartheid, which would relegate democracy to the museum of history? Will women find their rightful place? Will future societies succumb to drugs?

switch from a culture of violence to a culture of peace? Will the twenty-first century have a human aspect or the more grim attire of a "brave new world"? At the dawn of the twenty-first century, four unprecedented challenges await us. The first is peace. The Cold War is over but the present peace remains "hot". Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, some 30 wars, mostly intra-State, have continued to ravage vast areas of the globe. The illusions of perpetual peace and the end of history have vanished. Second challenge: will the twenty-first century be synonymous with growing, glaring inequality? Will an unparalleled degree of poverty be reached, whose victims will live alongside unprecedented wealth, separated from it by the reinforced glass panes of social and urban apartheid? As the new century dawns, more than three billion people — i.e. more than half of humanity — live in poverty, on less than \$2 a day. The share of the income of the wealthiest 20 per cent compared to that of the poorest 20 per cent of humanity has risen from 30 to 1 in 1960 to 61 to 1 in 1991 and to 81 to 1 in 1995. The "One fifth" society is thus perpetuated.

levels. Is it not likely that our development models, based on the unbridled use of non-renewable resources, will irretrievably compromise the development of future generations? Has the time not come to draw a line? Humanity now knows that it is mortal as it has the technical capacity to destroy itself. Who then will teach us to "master mastery"? Fourth challenge: the "darken boat" syndrome. As a result of globalisation, most problems no longer stop at border posts. Nor do radioactive clouds. These problems now call for worldwide solutions. As wise seamen say: "there is no good wind for one who has no course." No more than for the helmsman who has broken his tiller. Do we have a long-term plan? We may well ask. Many States appear to have mislaid their maps, piloting equipment and even the will to set themselves goals. Has history fallen into the hands of "anonymous masters"?

nation is more valuable than knowledge." That is why we must rebuild a planetary society if we wish to humanise globalisation and give it a real meaning. Four contracts should form the pillars of a new international democracy. First of all, we must conclude a new social contract. Priority must be given to rebuilding a sharing society through the eradication of poverty, in line with the commitment made by governments at the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development. We must harness the third industrial revolution and redistribute the dividends of globalisation in order to end the "one fifth" society. The second contract is the natural contract, founded on an alliance between science, development and environmental preservation. In addition to a social contract, negotiated between contemporaries, we must conclude a natural contract of long term and for the benefit of co-development with the Earth. Science must be freed from its Promethean complex of dominating nature. The third contract: the cul-

tural contract. Lifelong education for all will be one of its basic tenets. This objective should be a top priority for governments, but also for society as a whole: each citizen, like Socrates, should never stop learning and learning to learn. Nevertheless, this will not solve all our problems. To rebuild education as a citizen's project and a democratic issue, making indispensable resources available will not be sufficient. The already rampant school and university apartheid will also have to be reversed. In the absence of any firm, long-term political will, the principle of lifelong education for all could easily be split up between a select minority with access to the "paradise of knowledge," the "damned souls," doomed to new educational ghettos and the intermediate masses, stranded in ineffective purgatories. The revolution brought about by new technologies constitutes a fundamental challenge, but also a decisive tool at the heart of the natural contract. We need to convert the information society into a knowledge society, in places where telephones are still a

luxury. By the year 2020, will distance learning turn educational institutions into virtual worlds? Will electronic education include the excluded and reach the "untouchable" of knowledge? Will we be wise enough to draw up a cultural contract encouraging plurality and conviviality rather than promoting cultural conformity? Can we introduce a cultural dimension into development, firmly reestablishing the human being as its principle? The fourth contract: the ethical contract which must reinvent the human experience with meaning and perspective. Firstly, how can we encourage the growth of a culture of peace and of intelligent development, which, instead of crushing human beings, would be synonymous with growth based on knowledge and on the networking of knowledge and of competence? How can we give democracy a firmer hold in time and in space, by promoting this anticipatory and forward-looking concept of citizenship? Faced with the growth of the global market economy, will it be necessary to invent, one day, a democracy without borders in

either space or time? A new culture of democracy must be fashioned, which, beyond the contradictions of assimilation and of identity splits, of the State and the market, rediscovers the very basis of democracy: the principle of association, a founding concept for both Rousseau and Tocqueville. But this new ethical contract cannot be concluded without sharing. Bringing the benefits of globalisation to everyone was the objective of a recent G8-summit. This commitment must be made precisely and concretely, by using the dividends of peace to abolish the debt of the largest number of heavily indebted States from the year 2000 onwards, in order to enable Africa and other areas of the world, to make a new start. The third aspect of this new contract for peace and global government is the ethics of the future. How can we reinstate the long term and free ourselves from the hegemony of the short term? How can we strengthen our ability to anticipate and foresee? In the words of a Greek historian, "a political leader must not only have clear hands, he must also have clear eyes". How can we introduce into our children's education and that of future leaders, an ethics of the future conceived as an ethics of the present for the future?

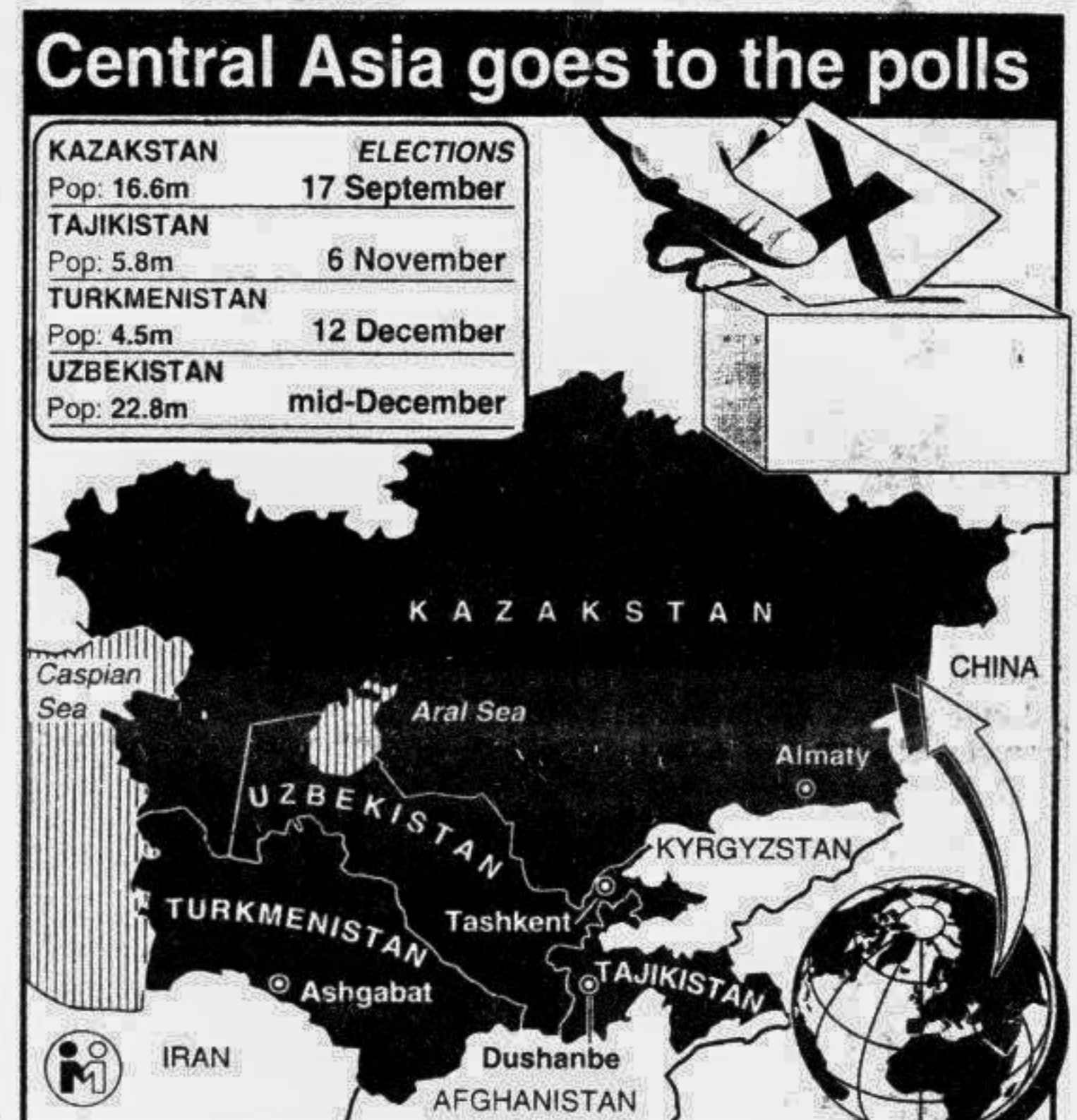
implement them, provided that political will is exercised. Will the cost be too high? We think not. Let us remember that global military spending amounts to \$700 to \$800 billion per annum, and considerable savings could be made by reducing this unproductive expenditure, by improving the productivity of the public services, by abolishing a number of ineffective subsidies and by fighting positively against corruption. Let us remember that the United Nations estimates at only \$40 billion per annum the cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education, to adequate nutrition, to drinking water and to elementary sanitary infrastructures, as well as to gynaecological and obstetric care for women. This sum represents less than 4 per cent of the total wealth of the world's 225 largest fortunes. On the one hand, \$40 billion are denied needy countries, on the other hand, \$700 to \$800 billion are spent each year on defence. Are there two sets of rules? Is the price of peace, development and democracy too high? "Expect nothing from the twenty-first century," said Gabriel Garcia Marquez. "It is the twenty-first century which expects everything from you."

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## Post-communist Polls: Free but Not Necessarily Fair

When Kazakhstan's 8.6 million voters elected their first multi-party Senate on 17 September, they set the stage for a string of polls in the Central Asian republics. But although communist party domination has gone, genuine political pluralism is not yet firmly established, writes Dilip Hiro of Gemini News Service.

ALTHOUGH impending elections suggest Central Asia's post-communist governments are committed to democracy, a key element is missing: the polls may be free, but they are not necessarily fair. Less than a decade ago, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were an integral part of a highly centralised Soviet Union, with the Communist Party firmly in charge. Electors simply voted for a list of candidates provided by party bureaucrats, and parliaments were rubber stamps. The communist system has gone, but the Soviet-era leaders remain. Today's Central Asian leaders are the same ones who held office when the Soviet Union collapsed. The exception is Tajikistan, whose communist leader, Rahman Nabiyev, died in 1994. Having risen to the top under the Soviet system, it is hard for them to fully shed their authoritarian ways and accept a credible opposition as an indispensable part of the political process. They pay lip-service to the virtues of multi-party democracy to propitiate the United States, the world's sole superpower, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to which their countries belong, and the International Monetary Fund, which shores up their fragile economies. Admittedly the demands made on leadership skills during the communist-era administration were nothing compared to the challenges presented in the post-independence period. They had to accomplish the unprecedented task of simultaneously switching from centralised to market economies, creating democratic political institutions and forging new national identities while maintaining social stability against a background of rising ethnic tensions.



The disappearance of an all-encompassing state ideology created a dangerous vacuum. The absence of a history both of democracy and of capitalism made the region susceptible to ethnic nationalism or Islamic fundamentalism. These ideologies are destabilising because they appeal exclusively to particular sections of the population rather than to people as a whole. Yet every Central Asian state is multi-ethnic. In Kazakhstan, for example, ethnic Russians and other Europeans outnumbered ethnic Kazaks and other central Asians at the time of independence. Ethnic rivalries in the region were suppressed during the Soviet era, but not eliminated.

the most stable of the new states, its democratic progress has been minimal. Progress has also been niggardly in Uzbekistan, where President Islam Karimov has refused to allow opposition groups to function freely. In Kazakhstan, President Sultan Nazarbayev used the intractability of his country's ethnic and economic problems as a rationale for concentrating power in his hands, clinging to office by fair means and foul. He passed laws heavily weighted against the opposition, and found a way of extending his tenure without the bother of an election. He held a referendum on private property, the character of statehood, the official language — and the postponement of the presidential poll to 2000. When voters endorsed the multi-point mandate, Nazarbayev was secure for five more years. (President Karimov of Uzbekistan used a similar device to extend his tenure from 1995 to 2000.) Last January, Nazarbayev's government provided voters with a multiple choice in the presidential election for the first time. But he disqualified the leading opposition figure, former prime minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin. The OSCE protested in vain. This time around, the OSCE sends observers to the Senate election. However, OSCE team leader Linda Edgeworth of the United States had warned that "the deployment of the election observation mission does not add legitimacy to the election process, nor does it imply endorsement of the legal framework, administrative practices or the political environment in which the election is being conducted." In short, despite the string of elections, there is still a long way to go before the OSCE can declare that democracy has struck roots in the Central Asian republics.

THE Soviet brand of communism was supposed to be the best form of governance for mankind — hinting that the Creator (of the Universe) did not bother Himself too much. It lasted two generations, and more. Then it failed — it collapsed — after 70 years. Why it took so long to learn the lesson? It is worth pondering when failures come late. Perhaps early warning signals are more divinely merciful. In Turkey, a massive earthquake was followed by stored oil tanks catching fire, adding to the misery. Natural calamities strike with a suddenness whose clarity and reality are numbing. The atom bombs on Japan finished the five years' war in a week. Within two generations Japan was competing in the global market with the Western powers. Now Japan is suffering from recession, said to be a punishment for the past operation in the Korean peninsula. People are no business without people. Thailand paid the price for

Time Takes its Toll by AMM Aabad. The Mughals ruled South Asia peacefully for half a millennium; followed by 200 years of the Sahibs' rule. But self-government is too hot to handle, even today, in the three countries since the Partition in 1947. Philippines had to pay for the weaknesses of Subic Bay. Now the meditation cult in China is said to have more members than listed in the communist party. The moon has been bombarded with metal garbage to find evidence of moisture. The scientists are waiting to see what happens on May 5, 2000, when five planets align in a configuration never recorded before, and the super-computers are feeling jittery. Nearer home, one agency has linked the slow arsenic poisoning with the construction of the Farakka barrage. This arsenic plague is said to be threatening

to become humanity's largest epidemic. There is no R&D, therefore so far no cure. The implications are staggering. What will happen to the millions of future generations? Mammon and materialism have displaced the moral mores of more societies than one. Power lies in not using it, according to classical wisdom. The modern corollary is to use power in short, sharp bursts. Oil may be slippery, but it also lubricates more than machinery. The pursuit of quick material assets brings in corruption and terrorism, disintegrates the society, and keeps discipline at bay. Thus is born the virus of self-destruction, after the lesson has been learnt. Therefore patience is called in to bear the suffering of the cleansing of the society. The charge for this laundry service is high — the creditor becomes the debtor. The transition period during the millennium will try men's minds, and bare the souls. There is nothing there — in addition, The millennium will take its toll.

## State of Literacy — a Debatable Issue?

by Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah

NEWSPAPERS in Bangladesh perhaps had a field day with the government's recently announced statistics on national literacy rate. These numbers were coming out on the eve of International Literacy Day, which was celebrated on September 8 in full galore. On this day, developing nations compare their literacy rate with one another and they assess how far they have to go to achieve the coveted goal of one hundred per cent literacy that had already been achieved by most developed nation. On September 10, one leading newspaper in its mentioned that according to government figure the nation's literacy rate is as high as 58 per cent. At the present rate of 5 per cent increase per year, it will take another 11 year to achieve a one hundred per cent literacy. As we move forward, it will be an arduous task to maintain a 5 per cent increase year-in-year-out. More resources will be needed to keep the momentum going. It is another matter altogether, whether the government and the NGOs involved in illiteracy eradication programme will pour additional resources to materialize the dream. Nonetheless, it is going to be an uphill battle through and through. The figures I have quoted above are all from Bangladesh's government source. We have the slightest clue as to the quality and trustworthiness of the data that is being reported to the press. There is a valid reason to be concerned since according to ASIaweek Bangladesh's literacy rate is about 38 per cent. This 20 per cent discrepancy is too big of a number to be reconciled. Could this figure be inflated by any chance? The other concern here is — why is the non-governmental figure so low? Are we dealing with two sets of standards by which one can define who is literate or not literate? I hope a high official from

One of the chief objects of education should be to widen the windows through which we view the world. — Arnold Glasgow. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics who is knowledgeable in this matter can shed light on it and explain all these discrepancies. It would not be a bad idea either to let everyone know the standard by which a person becomes literate in Bangladesh. When we grew up in the sixties we heard that to qualify as a literate person one has to know how to sign his or her name. That is it! I hope this stringent requirement had changed for the better. It won't be a monumental task to teach someone to sign, say, in an hour. Thus, theoretically illiteracy can be removed with days, if not hours. May be the standard test for literacy had included the test to see if a person can read simple signs written in the vernacular language and if the person can write simple sentences to express his or her thoughts. In developed countries, though, the requirement for being a literate person could be higher. In the 1980s in U.K. about 2 million illiterates were reported in the government figure. That translated to be about 3.5 per cent. (Source: Cambridge Encyclopedia, Year 1992). For the same period, the USA was thought to have 10-20 per cent illiterate people. If this number means anything then Bangladesh should not feel awkwardly about the present figure of 58 per cent literacy rate in the country. In addition, it is not a realistic goal to achieve a one hundred per cent literacy rate within the next decade or so. I would like to quote one additional statistics here to make a point that illiteracy among adults is still high by world standard. Among one-third of world's six billion peo-

ple, who are probably adult, about 900 million people are illiterate. That would translate to about 45 per cent of the adult population in the world who are illiterate. Isn't that a grim statistic. In the 1940s, the world body had defined a new term called functional literacy. This they have done to identify minimal levels of reading/writing efficiency in a given society. The standard was thus set to see how many could read the road signs, shop labels, and newspapers, and write one's name. I am hoping Bangladesh is using this absolute minimum to define a person a literate. In the West, though, the standard is set even higher. A person in Europe and America, for example, has to read and answer questions to obtain driving license. The reading comprehension level is exceedingly high to answer some hypothetical questions as they relate to driving in both urban and suburban locations. The phrase "computer literacy" used to pop up here and there in the late 1980s. However, it is now assumed that school graduates do know the computer jargons. Please don't get me wrong for bringing up the term "computer literacy" in this write-up. I mentioned it here to make a point that each country will have their standard jacked up to suit their need. May be in Bangladesh we are long way from there. But why not raise the level of standard to count someone as literate? Perhaps a person in Bangladesh has to attain a primary level education to qualify as a literate person. The term "functional literacy" is too low of a standard for now. Time has changed and

so should be the standard. If Bangladesh still follows the old standard, then when the country reaches 80 per cent literacy rate a complacency will set in knowing that the country has achieved its coveted goal. A lot more is desired in the field of education and we should set the standard a notch higher now. A vigorous debate should ensue -- now that the government has released the figure for literacy rate in the wee hours of this new millennium. The government never sponsors any public debate in Bangladesh. At least this writer is not aware of any such exercise in the past or present. The civil society, however, can stage their own public policy debate on various issues, like the one on literacy issue, through the pages of national newspapers. The quicker we do it the better off it will be for the nation to reap the benefit in not so distant future. It is hoped that the call for a debate and discussion on this issue will go unnoticed. The Administration should not be glowing for the encomium that they are about to receive for the job well done in this front. The country could excel in education even more provided the politicians would stop those inane harangues, march to nowhere and a host of other devious techniques to slow down the progress of the nation. Once we could institute the principle of democracy and fairplay in Bangladesh society, the common people will show a resiliency the nation had not experienced before. So, denounce vociferously the age-old tactics of politicians and take control of the civil society so that the long march towards prosperity can continue unabated. Literacy should be the cherished goals for those who do not have one; it surely would open new vistas because it would be a beacon for a better life. The writer is a senior scientist. He writes from New Orleans.

## Removing the Curse of Illiteracy

by Z A M Khairuzzaman

SEEMINGLY a noble programme of educating unlettered people is being carried out in almost all the districts of the country. The objective of this mass literacy programme is to remove the curse of illiteracy within the shortest possible time. Unlettered people aged between 11 and 45 years have been brought under the programme to impart minimum writing, reading and arithmetic skills. The officials of the Directorate of Non-formal Education Primary and Mass Education Division have been supervising the programme. In some places Bangladesh Masjed Mission has been providing informal education to the adults. Yet in some places the political parties, institutions, government and non-government offices have reportedly got united to make such programme a success. According to reports in Rangpur Sadar Upazila, such a mass literacy programme titled "Dipannita" has been launched on September 1. There are 130,000 illiterate people in the upazila out of a population of 495,000. A total of 4,333 centres have been set up to run the programme which is expected to be completed in nine months. In Brahmanbaria a mass literacy programme styled



A class in progress under TLM programme in Moulvibazar. "Prodipta Brahmanbaria" has been inaugurated recently. In Moulvibazar, a body titled "Nabodiganta Moulvibazar Committee" has been formed for the purpose. The district unit chiefs of all parties, institutions, government and non-government offices have been made members of the committee. Sub-committees would also be formed at thana, union and ward level in phases. In the first phase of the programme, 10-15 education centres for elderly people will be

45 centres in the union to provide reading, writing and simple arithmetic skills within a year. The learners were awarded certificates by the mission recently in a simple ceremony held at Abul Khair High School. Thanks to the organisers of such noble gesture, many hitherto unfortunate people seem to be removing the curse of illiteracy from their firmament by participating in such programmes. Meanwhile, the apparent success of Total Literacy Movement (TLM) programme has already created a sense of renewed hope among the government functionaries and the people as well. Thus TLM programmes are on a track of expanding day by day. The local administrations are entrusted with specific duties and responsibilities regarding TLM programme implementation. Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) provides logistics and technical support to the local administrations. Although the programme is voluntary in nature, there are provisions for awards or honorarium for teachers and supervisors based on their performance after completion of the programme.

