

Caritas to Aid State Education Goals

Vital to the country's development; Catholics in poorest rural areas

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Children study at a Caritas-run school in rural Bangladesh (Photo courtesy of Caritas Education Program)

Caritas Bangladesh yesterday joined government officials in endorsing the goal of total literacy in the country by 2014 during an event marking International Literacy Day in the capital.

Afsarul Amin, primary and mass education minister, told a gathering of educators, government officials and NGO staff members at Osmani memorial auditorium that education was vital to the country's development.

"Without absolute literacy no nation can progress. The government is working hard to attain that goal by 2014," he said.

"This year almost a hundred percent of children have enrolled in school. I especially thank those NGOs who helped make that happen."

He added that literacy was also an integral part of achieving and maintaining peace.

Shishir Rozario, education project coordinator for Caritas who attended the event, said the group is one of the leading NGOs in the country focused on

education issues and that it will continue to assist the government in reaching its goal of complete literacy.

"We've been working to eradicate illiteracy since 1983 to help the government. Currently we run 463 schools in various areas of the country that benefit 27,780 poor students.

The state-run Non-Formal Education Bureau estimates that the country's current literacy rate stands at 53 percent, with an estimated 37.3 million people qualifying as completely illiterate.

Supti Biswas, a teacher in Dhaka, said poverty remains a challenge to achieving target education goals.

"Poor parents are reluctant to send their kids to school. Moreover, they are not aware of the bad effects of illiteracy."

She added that some parents consider subjects such as music or art as useless or a waste of time.

He added that Caritas schools also provide additional curricula, including music and art for the intellectual growth of students.

Most Caritas schools are located in extremely poor and remote areas where government facilities have yet to reach.

"We're keen to make schooling a pleasing experience for the kids. So we try to do it in a way they love," Rozario said.