As population soars, so do dropouts and illiterates

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE, April 27: Punjab Literacy and Non-Formal Basic Education Department Secretary Dr Pervaiz Ahmad Khan says the high rate of population growth, high rate of dropouts from schools and relatively little efforts to educate masses are resulting in a higher number of children and adults staying illiterate and uneducated.

Dr Khan was speaking at a seminar organised in connection with the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to mobilize additional political and financial support for the achievement of the Education for All (EFA) goals by PACADE with UNESCO at Lahore Press Club on Friday. The theme of this year’s GCE is ‘Early Childhood Care and Education’.

He said schools were available in one kilometre radius almost everywhere and free textbooks were also being provided to all students in public schools, but population explosion at the rate of 2.5 per cent per annum undermined all initiatives. He said that there were some 38.17 million uneducated people in Punjab. Similarly, he said, some 6.5 million school-going age children were out-of-school and needed to be caught through formal and non-formal education initiatives.

He regretted that people had been kept in an environment, where they were not able to differentiate between pros and cons of staying illiterate and becoming literate. As every good thing in this world is related to literacy, he said, education is the only tool to transform one’s life for ever.

Dr Khan said the literacy rate in Punjab was 60 per cent, while in rural and urban areas it ranged between 55-70 per cent and 35 to 40 per cent. He said women’s literacy rate in Punjab was less than the men’s.

In order to create incentives for people, he said, the Punjab literacy and non-formal basic education department had decided to include skills as a value addition in its literacy programmes from the next financial year. He said the department had sought permission to use schools’ buildings in the evening to run non-formal literacy programmes.

Unesco Education Officer Arshad Seeded Khan said Pakistan was the signatory to the six goals of the EFA, including the Early Childhood Education (ECE). He said the ECE was highly important because it formed their personalities on the basis of learning during first eight years of life. “Children are born learners,” he said.

He said the experience showed that the children, who enter education in early childhood hardly drop out from schools and instead take interest in their studies. He said Unesco had developed ECE resource centres in four provinces, published teacher guides as well as imparted training to ECE teachers.

Mr Khan said education indicators in Pakistan as well as in Punjab were not encouraging and the trend showed that Pakistan would not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Mr Khan said provinces must legislate at the earliest to implement Article 25-A of the Constitution; education budget be increased to seven per cent of the GDP by 2015, and include special budget line for the ECE. Stating that there was a vacuum after devolution of education to provinces level, he stressed the need to establish an inter-provincial coordination forum on education.

Punjab school education department deputy secretary Qaiser Rasheed said the government allocated Rs250 million for the ECE. He said public schools were being improved with the help of school councils.

Punjab University faculty of education dean Prof Dr Hafiz Muhammad Iqbal stressed the need to improve schools culture so that children could be attracted to schools.

PACADE president Inayatullah said some five million children were out of schools in Punjab, while around 40 million people could not read the bus number. Stating that all children must be given equal education opportunities, he said the media should also give more space to issues related to education.

Ms Sophia Malik also spoke.