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## Books bring souls together: Hasina

CALCUTTA, Jan. 27:— Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today (Wednesday) said Bangladesh, as the only language-based country in South Asia, is the focal point of the flourishing of Bengali, reports UNB.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Calcutta Book Fair '99 as chief guest, Hasina said: "Bengali is our mother tongue. We Bengalis sacrificed a lot to protect our mother tongue. Many had to lay down their lives to save the language in the past."

She added: "We are the only people who played a rare role of sacrificing lives to protect the prestige of the language."

Expressing gratitude for selecting Bangladesh as the "focal theme" of the book fair, the Prime Minister said books establish a cultural bridge between the past and the present.

"Books establish bonds of friendship between countries, between nations and between the societies. Books bring souls together."

She said books open up the colorful horizon of the world civilization to the mankind, refine the human soul and sharpen the conscious of the people helping them to develop as good citizens.

"So, to develop a person or a society the need for reading more books is necessary. A coordinated and continuous effort is necessary

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## Books bring

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to develop the habit of reading books. For this, we need a vigorous social movement. And a book fair can play an important and effective role to create the social movement."

The Bangladesh Prime Minister said book fair is an essential part of the cultural activities of the Bengalis.

"International book fair gives us the opportunity to know the world history. We're proud of joining the book fair which has created a big confluence of peace; progress and development."

Referring to the ensuing 21st century, Hasina said: "We don't have enough time to lose. We'll have to materialise the one-world theory if we want to make ourselves fit for a modern world."

She hoped that the book fair would play an important role in building cooperation among intellectuals and publishers of the Bangla-speaking people of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Forty-five publishing houses of Bangladeshi are taking part in this year's book fair. Bangladesh has been participating in the Calcutta book fair since 1995.

Earlier, the Bangladesh Prime Minister was given a hearty welcome at the entrance of the Book fair where a group of girls wearing red-bordered white sarees showered petals on her.

After the inauguration of the fair, Hasina ceremonially opened the Bangladesh Gate and Bangladesh Pavilion there. She went round different bookstalls of Bangladesh.