

New books, big smiles

4.4cr schoolkids start getting free textbooks on first day of New Year

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For schoolchildren all over the country, the first morning of the New Year came with the refreshing smell of fresh textbooks.

As they went to their respective schools braving the morning chill yesterday, they each were handed over a new set of textbooks at all primary and secondary schools.

Beaming with joy, some students held the books up in the air, while some were flipping through the pages after receiving them with a feeling of sheer happiness written on their faces.

"I am very happy to get my new textbooks. I will read the Bangla book first as I love poetry and stories most," said Ipshta Naznin, a class VI student at Dhanmondi Government Girls' High School in Dhaka.

Ishan Ahmed, student of Mirpur National Government Primary School, could hardly contain his excitement. "We got our results [of primary terminal exams] yesterday [Thursday], and are getting new books today. We did not have to wait for a single day."

The exuberance of students turned every school ground into a veritable carnival yesterday, the first day of the new academic session and the much-awaited "Textbook Festival Day" as the government started distributing free textbooks among the students like the last six years.

This year, the government will provide 33.38 crore copies of textbooks to 4.44 crore students of pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical education schools and ebtedai and dakhil madrasas.

In order to solve the textbook crisis that had persisted for many years, the

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government in 2009 decided to distribute textbooks to students at free of cost. Since then, it has distributed more than 189.21 crore copies of textbooks to primary and secondary students.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid inaugurated the festival at Government Laboratory School in the capital around 9:30am yesterday. He handed over the books to visually impaired student Tasneem Binte Rashed and 13 other students of class VI to IX from different institutions. He also released balloons along with the officials of his ministry and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

The school premises wore a colourful atmosphere with several thousand students of six education institutions attending the programme. Sitting before a podium wrapped with red and green clothes, they held festoons and colourful balloons in one hand and textbooks on the other.

A cultural programme was also held to mark the occasion.

Greeting the students, the education minister said there was no instance in the world where the government printed and dispatched such a huge volume of books to the students of all education institutions in rural areas on time.

"We are pleased to see the students happily returning home with a set of new books each," Nahid added.

He also said when the government had started free distribution of books in 2010, the number of students was around

2.5 crore. Now the number had jumped up to more than 4.44 crore and the number of books had also risen by this time, he added.

Each of the books cost Tk 19.24, he mentioned.

The minister urged the students to concentrate on their studies to get the best possible education and take the country to its desired height.

After the speeches of the minister and other officials, the books were handed over to the students.

All the children were jubilant after getting books from a minister. They played drums and waved placards and balloons. Parents and teachers too joined the ceremony.

Meanwhile, Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman inaugurated the distribution of primary books at Mirpur National Government Primary School by releasing colourful balloons and pigeons.

"Our children will be able to make a country based on knowledge," he said.

After the inauguration, he talked to students and wanted to know their aspirations about the books.

Asked about the standard of printing, Mostafizur Rahman told reporters that a high-powered committee formed by his ministry was working on the issue.

Students of more than a dozen primary schools in Mirpur area joined the festival.

"I will flip through the pages of my books when I reach home," said Abrar Hossain, a class-V student of Mirpur National Government Primary School.