

The Bangladesh Times

FOR HEALTHY READING HABITS

The people are the real masters in a democracy. They not only give verdict directly on important national issues — as they did on the form of government in this country earlier this year—but also decide routine legislative issues and run the administration indirectly through their chosen representatives.

The quality of the administration is understandably related to the quality of the masters. And to improve their quality we have to educate and inform them adequately. The level of literacy in the country does not indicate we have been making serious endeavours to that end. However, the government is now set for ensuring education for all by the year 2000.

Besides compulsory primary education a programme for mass literacy is being taken up. Some 500 mass literacy centres, each with facilities for teaching 30 persons at a time, would be set up in 69 upazilas during the next two years and in phases all the upazilas would be covered to free the country of the curse of illiteracy.

These efforts, of course, need to be supported by adequate reading materials and also healthy reading habit of the people. The publishing industry and library movement feature prominently in such a programme.

Indeed, books are the most convenient repository of knowledge and one of the bases of civilisation. The use of books and extent of libraries reflect the cultural level of the nation. Bangladesh however, lacks the infrastructure necessary for a flourishing publication industry and no serious efforts have till lately been evident for developing the same.

The literacy rate continues to be dismally low so that demands for books and publications are limited, the potential clientele lacks purchasing power and reading habit of the people too isn't encouraging. The contents of the locally produced books are not always upto the mark. This needs to be improved to a great extent to attract wider readership and in that only the writers can contribute.

All these issues came to the fore at the opening ceremony of the on-going National Book Fair. The thirteenth National Book Fair organised by the National Book Centre at the Osmany Memorial Hall being participated in by 50 publishing houses, would run upto January 4. There are 64 stalls at the Fair, a number of which represent foreign countries.

Inaugurating the fortnight long fair, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia stressed that a conscious citizenry is the most effective vanguard of democracy. "We have to acquire knowledge in order to understand the problems of the country and find out their solutions." The progress of the nation depends much on the development of its book world and the reading habit of the people. She laid emphasis on inculcating reading habit, raising the standard of the contents of the books and improving the quality of printing.

Begum Zia made the welcome announcement on the occasion that the government would formulate a national book policy soon and sought cooperation of all concerned in this respect. We hope the policy would embrace all aspects of publishing industry and help the children grow in healthy cultural atmosphere and meet the needs of the grown-ups and the older generations to ensure a better tomorrow for all.

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