

PM opens Book Fair

Year 2002 declared National Book Year

Staff Correspondent

With a call for building up a library movement to enlighten the people, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on Tuesday declared the New Year of 2002 as the National Book Year.

"I earnestly request you all to list a book as a precious gift, to present beloved ones a book on every occasion," she said while inaugurating the 15-day "Dhaka Boi Mela (Book Fair)-2002" at National Parade Ground in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city.

The Premier disclosed that her government was planning to form a "Library Commission" for getting advice on a regular basis for the development of libraries.

Realistic steps will be taken to enact library-related laws as per recommendations of the National

Book Policy 1994. The government is preparing two projects to provide material support to library movement, she told the function.

Terming the picture of study in the country as bleak, Begum Zia expressed optimism that reading habit among the masses would be expanded if more libraries should be built and proper books of adequate number supplied at every nook and corner of the country. "As a result, the publication industry will flourish," she added.

Presided over by State Minister for Cultural Affairs Begum Selima Rahman, the inaugural function was also addressed by Secretary of the Cultural Affairs Ministry Nazmul Ahsan Chowdhury and Director Jatiya Grantha Kendra

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Abdul Awal Hawlader, Education Minister Dr Osman Faruq, Prime Minister's Adviser Prof Jahanara Begum and Deputy Minister for Education Abdus Salam Pintu attended the function.

Jatiya Grantha Kendra under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is the organiser of the *Dhaka Boi Mela-2002*, the 8th of the kind since 1995, with the theme "Book for building a healthy society". A total of 108 organisations, including four from abroad, are taking part in the Book Fair.

The Prime Minister reassured of cooperation from her government to the development of libraries and said the library network would be expanded at the union levels in the light of the book policy which was first in Bangladesh among the SAARC countries.

She listed a number of steps undertaken by her previous administration until 1996 for the development of libraries and blamed the subsequent Awami League regime for creating "stagnation" in the library movement.

Begum Zia further recalled the initiatives taken by the government of President Ziaur Rahman in 1980-81 for setting up some 100 public libraries at the thana level and mentioned that the scheme had been cancelled after the BNP government was ousted from power in 1982.

Referring to the advancement of civilisation as a blessing of books that carry knowledge and science, the Prime Minister, in this context, regretted that "the picture of our country is not encouraging."

The State Minister for Cultural Affairs, Selima Rahman, said a proper library movement could free the countrymen from the present curse of terrorism and aggression of alien culture.

She criticised the previous AL government for negligence in bringing forth the plan for holding an international book fair in Dhaka and hoped that it would be arranged in the near future.

Later, the Prime Minister distributed the textbooks among some students between Class I and X. The function was informed that the textbooks reached all the 64 districts on the very first day of the academic year.

Begum Zia also handed over an award with crest, sponsored by Bangladesh National Museum, to library organiser Principal Mohammad Sharif Hossain.