

Govt asks primary schools to keep Zia, Khaleda, Tarique books

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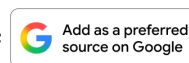
Arafat Rahaman



All government primary schools have been asked to keep three books -- two on late president Ziaur Rahman, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, and one written by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

On June 3, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education wrote to the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), directing it to ensure that one set of the books is kept in the libraries of government primary schools.

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The books are “President Zia: Rajnoitik Jiboni”, “Begum Khaleda Zia: Jibon O Songram”, and “Sobar Agey Bangladesh”.

The first two, written by Mahfuz Ullah, are on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia. The third is listed as a book by Tarique Rahman. All three were published by Jatiyatabadi Prokashona Sangstha.

Rowshan Ara Poly, deputy secretary of the ministry, who signed the letter, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star. Asked about the reason behind the directive, she suggested talking to DPE officials.

Contacted, DPE Director General Shahina Ferdousi said the directorate only forwarded the ministry's instruction to field-level officials.

“The ministry requested us to take necessary steps so that one set of the three books is available in the libraries of government primary schools. The letter came to me, and we only endorsed it and forwarded it.”

She said the ministry is the policymaking authority when asked about concerns that the move resembled practices during the previous government, when books linked to ruling party figures were kept in educational institutions.

“The ministry is the policymaker, and we implement its decisions. We work according to its instructions. Since the instruction came to me asking us to take necessary steps, I have just endorsed it,” the DG said.

Asked for her opinion, Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said school libraries should have books on all major national figures, not only those linked to a single political stream.

She said books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia could be kept in school libraries as supplementary reading materials, but questioned why books on other national leaders were not included.

“As a citizen, I would expect balance. Our students and the new generation should know the true history,” she told The Daily Star.

“Why only these three? Why not Maulana Bhashani? Why not General Osmani? Why not the four national leaders? Let everything come. The new generation is smart enough to decide.”

Rasheda said Ziaur Rahman's contribution had been "suppressed" and students should know about it, but the contributions of others should also be presented.

"We should not again make it one-sided. The balance has to be maintained."

The Daily Star last night tried to contact State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Bobby Hajjaj for comments on the rationale behind the decision, but he did not respond to questions sent to his WhatsApp.

Primary and Mass Education Secretary Md Shakhawat Hossain also did not respond to calls.

During the Awami League tenure, similar initiatives involving books and materials on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman drew criticism for using educational institutions to promote ruling party narratives.

In August 2019, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education directed officials and teachers concerned to buy 27 books for students of all government and non-government high schools and colleges. The 27 books, all on Bangabandhu, were published by Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

Between 2017 and 2024, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board printed Sheikh Hasina's photograph on the back cover of textbooks for classes I-V.



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The DSHE asked all educational institutions in 2014 to collect three books on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman written by a bureaucrat.

The then parliamentary standing committee on the primary and mass education ministry in June 2017 recommended displaying Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's portrait in every primary school classroom and office.