

# Public libraries to get a facelift

NEW DELHI, Jan 28 – Public libraries are set for a major facelift, starting this year, under the National Mission on Libraries (NML) to check the dwindling footfalls and give a boost to reading habits.

"Public libraries have a crucial role in dissemination of knowledge and information. Through innovative ways, we are going to engage citizens in both physical and digital space and help them access reading material in print and electronic form with the help of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)," Ravindra Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Culture said.

Kolkata-based Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation is the nod-

al agency for the execution of this Rs 400 crore project which will modernise 629 district libraries in the country and connect them with each other. The project is scheduled to be launched by President Pranab Mukherjee on February 3 in Kolkata.

"We plan to accomplish this modernisation through a two-pronged strategy: improvement of infrastructure and upgradation of technology in libraries on the one hand and capacity building on the other," Singh said.

Libraries are set to have Wi-Fi enabled reading rooms with modern furniture, lighting system, carrels for scholars, senior citizens and

specially abled persons, modern signage, power backup, purified drinking water equipment and washrooms.

In addition, there will be games facilities for children, besides Internet, conference room, recording room and training-cum-meeting room.

"Since creation of new institutions or libraries may not be feasible, it is better to upgrade the existing libraries by improving their infrastructure," K K Banerjee, Di-

rector General of Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation said.



Cataloguing will also be done for not only of books and journals but

also of all policies of the government in public domain to facilitate easy access and research work. Efforts will also be made to provide reading material in a multilingual mode.

"By providing reading material in different languages, we intend to facilitate universal access. As a part of the objective, libraries will be encouraged to create more digital resources by digitising relevant reading material in various languages. Our vision is to create a

network of public libraries where information is digitised and easily exchanged," Banerjee said.

Libraries covered under the NML will also provide e-journal or e-book services to the patrons and procure reading resources to meet local needs. For advocacy and outreach programmes, libraries will host quiz contests, music competitions and creative writing workshops. Extension counters of these libraries will also open in local schools. For maintaining data repositories, cloud computing will also be adopted.

"We are also going to build a National Virtual Library which will be accessible by all 629 libraries and will also help in capacity build-

ing," Banerjee told PTI.

For capacity building, library professionals working in public libraries will be given need-based training to improve managerial skill and competence to utilize ICT applications. It will also include students from Library Science Schools who have just received degree in B.Lib Sc and other equivalent.

"Training of library professionals is the key to develop libraries of the future. We may eventually go for ISO certification as it is important for the standard practices in libraries," Singh said.

The government had approved this scheme on November 28, 2013. – PTI