



People of all walks of life dressed up for a weekend at the book fair, browsing books and taking in this month-long celebration of literature.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A gathering of literary enthusiasts

MATHEWS CHIRAN

After an exhausting month of trade fair and city polls, the book fair got off to a slow start on February 2. But as the first weekend of the month rolled around, city dwellers thronged the fair, re-energised and ready to indulge in literature.

People of all ages visited with their friends, family, and loved ones, browsing books at Suhrawardy Udyan and Bangla Academy. Weekends at Amar Ekushey Book Fair is crowded, but the ambience remains festive.

The fair opened its gate at 11am yesterday, and children enjoyed their time at Shishu Prohor with Sisimpur characters: Halum, Shiku, Tuktuki and Ikri. Every Friday and Saturday, the 11am-1pm time slot is dedicated to Shishu Prahar, where parents bring their little ones.

"My daughter watches these characters on TV and now she is seeing them live. I am delighted to see her happiness," said Farida Zaman, mother of seven-year-old Rafia, who was playing beside the stage with other children.

Besides, as Swadhinata Stambha

(Independence Memorial) lake at Suhrawardy Udyan is now a part of book fair premises, people get to sit at the lakeside, taking in the view and spending quality time with loved ones.

Couple of yards afar from the lake, there is a designated spot for writers, where they hold discussions on contemporary literature, and the audience also joins the conversation from time to time.

"The whole experience of the fair is exquisite. It gives you an excuse to reunite with old friends you haven't seen in a while. It's not just about buying books, it's a gathering of literary enthusiasts," said Arupa Haider, a private university teacher, who was sitting with her partner Raisul

Islam on the grass, waiting to see a writers' discussion.

On the left side of the writers' corner, there is a Mukto Mancha, and beside it, five artists were drawing portraits of attendees for a few hundred taka.

"Usually couples come to us for portraits. It acts as a memento of their time

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Fire guts 200 shanties in two Banani slums

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 200 shanties were gutted in a massive fire tore through two slums in the capital's Banani T&T area early yesterday.

However, no casualty was reported.

The fire broke out at the Godown Slum and Bede Slum around 3:30am, Rasel Shikder, a duty officer at the Fire Service and Civil Defense headquarters, told The Daily Star.

On information, 22 fire engines rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze around 7:00am.

It is still unclear what caused the fire.

The fire service officials, however, suspected that the fire originated from an incident of gas leak or short circuit.

A four-member committee led by fire service Deputy Director Nur Hossain has been formed to look into the incident and estimate the damage.

The fire incident took place at a time when most of the slum dwellers were in sleep. They were forced to run out of their rooms leaving their belongings.

Witnesses said the flames spread immediately throughout the slum.

Jahanara Begum, a slum dweller, said she woke up from sleep hearing screams and she came out immediately and without taking anything with her.

She had a shop in the slum which has turned into ashes. "My four children are studying at schools. How would I bear the cost now?" lamented Jahanara.

Another slum dweller Musa Hossain said he had Tk 4 lakh in cash, two shops and a warehouse.

"Everything's gone. I could not save anything," Musa said, as tear rolled down his face.

The slum dwellers had no way but to live under the bare sky at a nearby field.

Some complained about the lacks in rescue operation of the fire service. They said the fire service could not spray water properly at the right time.

However, the fire service officials said the rescue operation was delayed due to water shortage and narrow roads.

Brig Gen Sajjad Hossain, director general of the fire service and civil defence department, visited the spot.

BNP nominated mayor candidate for

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Ducsu opposes unified entry exams

DU CORRESPONDENT

Members of Dhaka University Central Students Union (Ducsu) yesterday opposed unified admission tests at all public universities, saying that it would hamper "distinctiveness and tradition" of DU entry test.

The proposal to oppose the decision -- taken by University Grants Commission more than two weeks ago -- was placed by Ducsu Assistant General Secretary Md Saddam Hussain and passed unanimously at its fourth executive meeting, said Ducsu General Secretary Golam Rabbani.

Talking about another issue, the Ducsu members complained to the vice-chancellor that proctor Prof Golam Rabbani is not student friendly and does not treat students properly.

Ducsu General Secretary Golam Rabbani told The Daily Star that the vice chancellor assured them of taking the allegation into account.

The VC said he would suggest the proctor to become more student friendly, he added.

At the Dhaka University Central Students Union meeting, its members and leaders proposed for introducing more bus routes for DU students, banning plastic products on the campus and allotting seats from last year.

They also demanded formulating a policy for development fees, making full-fledged lists of students with disabilities and establishing footnotes at the bases of all sculptures on the campus.

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Street movement cannot free Khaleda: info minister

BSS, Dhaka

Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday reiterated that there is no way of freeing BNP chief Khaleda Zia through movements or street campaigns. The only way to get her released from jail would be the legal way, he added.

"BNP is showing disrespect to the law and the court by repeatedly raising the demand to the government for releasing Begum Zia," he said, addressing a meeting at an auditorium of Jatiya Press Club.

Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote (BSJ) organised the event, marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and "Mujib Borsho", with BSJ president Sarah Begum Kobori in the chair.

Awami League Office Secretary and Prime Minister's Special Assistance Barrister Biplob Barua addressed the discussion as key speaker while BSJ general secretary Arun Sarker Rana conducted it.

The minister said BNP yesterday called for rallies demanding Khaleda's release. "The BNP chief is in prison being convicted in a graft case and only the court can release her. The government has no jurisdiction to

release her," he added.

"BNP's rally goes against the court. I think the court will take proper steps..." said Hasan, also Awami League joint general secretary.

Referring to the trials of Pakistani leader Nawaz Sharif and Indian leader Jayalalitha, Hasan said their parties did not wage any movement against the court decisions.

The minister said they [BNP] always created anarchy in the name of movement and assaulted people and vandalised vehicles. Many untoward incidents took place when they held rallies for the release of Khaleda, he added.

About BNP leaders' allegations on the recent city corporation elections, he said the polls were held in a transparent manner.

Regarding BNP's complaints on using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Hasan said EVM is a modern technology, which was used in the general election in India and no complaints were raised about it there. Even, EVM was used in the US, he added.

"I cannot understand why BNP opposes the use of this modern technology in elections. BNP always opposes modern

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PM returns home from Italy

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returned home yesterday morning from Milan concluding her four-day official visit to Italy at the invitation of her Italian counterpart Giuseppe Conte.

An Emirates Airlines flight carrying the prime minister and her entourage landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 8am.

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen and PM's Principal Secretary Dr Ahmad Kaikaus were, among others, present at the airport to receive the premier.

On her way back home, the prime minister made a two-hour stopover in Dubai.

Sheikh Hasina went to Milan from Italian capital of Rome on Thursday afternoon. She reached Rome on February 4 from Dhaka.

During the visit, the prime minister held a bilateral meeting with Giuseppe Conte at Palazzo Chigi, official residence of the Italian prime minister, in the Italian capital on February 5 and also joined an official lunch there.

The two leaders, at the nearly one-hour meeting, discussed bilateral relations and expressed satisfaction over the present state of economic cooperation between Bangladesh and Italy.

At the talks, the Italian premier pledged to provide one million Euros to help the Rohingyas in addition to

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PHOTO: PTD

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen received Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Dhaka airport yesterday.

Attack on Jouno 4 more held in Mohammadpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab arrested four youths in the capital's Mohammadpur on Friday night in connection with an attack on journalist Mostafizur Rahman Sumon during February 1 city elections.

The arrestees are Jahirul Islam Apu (26), Rasel Hawlader (35), Masud (18) and Alauddin (21), said Lt Col Ashique Billah, commanding officer of Rab-2.

The Rab official said they identified the four by scrutinising CCTV footages and other cameras.

Of the four, Rasel is step brother-in-law of Awami League-backed

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Be more transparent in sharing info: speakers

Seminar held on a decade of the RTI Act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior government officials at a discussion yesterday urged all public servants to be transparent when it comes to sharing information with people. This, the speakers said, will help to ensure an open flow of information.

If information is shared this way, it not only ensures transparency and accountability of the government's activities, but also helps accelerate the ongoing development of the country, the officials said.

On the occasion of a decade of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, enacted in 2009, the Cabinet Division and Information Commission jointly organised the discussion at Officers Club in the capital.

Speaking as the chief guest, Cabinet

Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said open flow of information is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within 2030 and the government's plan to turn the country into a developed nation according to Vision 2041.

"We will have to change our traditional mindset and be more open to share information if we want to achieve these targets," the cabinet secretary said, addressing government employees.

Chief Information Commissioner Martuza Ahmed said the formulation and implementation of RTI in 2009 was a groundbreaking event in the country's history as it helped to ensure people's access to information widely.

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DHAKA TODAY

TALK

Web Development Career Options
Venue: EMK Center
Time: 4:30pm

ACADEMIC SESSION

Why we need research for US university admission
Venue: EMK Center
Time: 3pm

DRAMA

Drapadi Parampara
Organiser: Theatre Arambagh
Venue: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Time: 7pm

BOOK FAIR

Amar Ekushey Granthamela
Venue: Suhrawardy Udyan and Bangla Academy
Time: 3pm

MUSIC

Plugged Out
Organiser: The Project Cure Machine
Venue: Counter Culture Club
Time: 5pm

EXHIBITION

Whiny Women
Organiser: Women in Arts
Venue: SAVVA, Gulshan-2
Time: 12pm





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