

Dhaka Day by Day

A Cherished Tradition

by Aasha Mehreen Amin



Interior of a book-stall with exceptional decoration. Photo: Imtiaz Beg

As traditions go, the annual Ekushey Boi Mela at the Bangla Academy premise is one that never fails to create a wave of excitement among us. After all, how many times do we get a chance to browse among a sea of books written by our favourite and not-so-favourite authors? Certainly not often in this city where there is a great dearth of good libraries. For book lovers, therefore, the 'boi mela' is something close to paradise.

This year's 'boi mela' boasts a dramatic number of about 900 stalls! Whether this is a good thing or not is, however, something to be looked into more closely. Nearly nine hundred stalls may be an impressive number considering that last year's fair had half of this, but one must not forget that only about 600 are exclusively bookstalls. The rest have been reserved for either food and every thing else on earth — except books of course.

The stall owners are quite disgruntled by this number. One can see why this is so. For one thing, there are too many stalls in too little space, giving the area a very cramped, disorganized look. The stalls are arranged in a maze-like fashion so that one does not know where the line begins and where it ends. This leaves the possibility for many stalls at the end of this maze, to be missed by visitors. Sales are also suffering because of this. "Last year, when there were fewer stalls, we sold many books," says a stall owner, a remark reiterated by many others. "There are just too many stalls, and if your particular stall is buried at the back, then nobody will come all the way to see your stall," says another stall owner.

Depressed sales make the stall rents seem quite high for the participants in this book fair. A large stall costs about Tk 5,000 for the whole month, while the small ones cost Tk 3,000 each.

Another reason why sales have been disappointing says, Bobby, in charge of a stall, is because "people are not so interested in books; they're more interested in the other stuff outside". This however does not mean that there aren't enough visitors for the 600 or so bookstalls arranged inside the Bangla Academy compound. Thousands of people pour in every afternoon after 3:00 pm when all the bookstalls are open. The thing is that only a handful actually buy books. The rest have

"other attractions to pursue." Like watching members of the opposite sex or not missing the chance of bumping into celebrities like Humayun Ahmed, Tasleema Nasreen, or even perhaps Moushumi, the film actress whose biography can be seen in some stalls.

The reluctance in buying books is also partly due to the fact that many of these stalls offer the same books. This gives the stalls a rather generic appearance and leaves the potential buyer in a state of confusion as to which stall will have the particular book he wants. Why the books are not sold only by their particular publishing houses is a question that many irritated visitors would like to know. In fact there are only a handful of stalls given by publishing houses. The rest are either bookshops or individual book collectors.

As far as appearances are concerned, most of the stalls look very similar. Except a few exceptions, 'Prakiton', for example, is a stall that stands out in this fair. Made completely with rough tree barks in the ceiling and walls, with a bamboo floor, it symbolizes the stall's name which means 'common man' quite aptly. A few other stalls have similar though not quite as dramatic, themes of nature such as Biswa Sahitya Kendra's straw roof and 'Sonar Bangla's stall decorated with cane 'dalas' (trays) and jute sacks. 'Chetona' is also quite unique, decorated with a Shahid Minar painted against a blue background all shredded into tiny bits of paper. Another stall has decorated itself with black school slates with Bengali alphabets and numbers along with a kite.

Other stalls stand out for their curious and sometimes incongruous names. There is 'Dabba' (which means failure in colloquial Bangla), named, according to the stall keeper, after a popular place of 'adda' or gossip for himself and his friends and to reflect their current unemployed, frustrated, state. Then there are names like Shamolina, Business Study Club and 'Current Books' written in Bangla, that will make many wonder how they fit in with the Ekushey February theme.

Although the Ekushey Boi Mela has its flaws, it gives a rare opportunity to any book lover. To be immersed (almost literally speaking) in thousands of books in one's mother tongue is something that is a rare treat for any Bangalee. Let this wonderful tradition never cease to exist.

Weather

Temperature may fall

By Staff Correspondent

Dr weather with a fair sky is likely to prevail over the country in the next 24 hours commencing from 6:00 am today (Friday).

The Met Office forecasts, night temperature may fall by one to two degrees Celsius over the country.

The country's highest temperature of 28.2 degrees Celsius was recorded in Teknaf and the lowest of 11.3 degrees Celsius was recorded in Dinajpur yesterday.

The maximum and the minimum temperatures and relative humidity recorded in some major cities and towns of the country yesterday were:

Cities/Towns	Temperature in degrees Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	9 am	6 pm
Dhaka	25.3	13.6	85	53
Chittagong	26.8	15.1	90	81
Rajshahi	24.8	11.5	88	65
Khulna	26.2	15.6	86	69
Barisal	26.2	16.0	94	62
Sylhet	23.8	15.2	96	64
Dinajpur	22.4	11.3	84	81

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Noman tells workshop

Steps undertaken to make women self reliant

CHITTAGONG, Feb 10: Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Abdullah-Al-Noman today said that the government had undertaken various programmes in line with strategies adopted at Nairobi conference to make the women self-reliant, reports BSS.

He was speaking at the chief guest at the inaugural ceremony of a workshop on 'equality, development and peace for the advancement of women' held today here at a local hotel.

The Department of Women Affairs with the courtesy of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organised the day-long workshop. Forty representatives from different government and non-government organisations took part in it.

The state minister-in-charge of the Ministry of Women Affairs Sarowari Rahman also spoke on the occasion as the special guest.

Secretary of the Ministry of Women Affairs Md Enamul Huq presided.

Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Women Affairs Sirajuddin Ahmed, assistant resident representative of the UNDP at Dhaka Sophie De Laen also spoke on the occasion.

The State Minister said the main objective of this work-

shop was to identify the problems and find out solutions of womenfolk with regard to their participation in government development programmes.

Similar workshop will be organised at Khulna and Rajshahi followed by National Workshop at Dhaka to analyse the problems of women and formulate strategies to place them at the Beijing conference to be held in 1995.

Biswas, Khaleda greet Iranian President

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday felicitated Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on the occasion of the National Day of Iran, reports UNB.

In a message to Rafsanjani, President Biswas hoped that the existing bilateral relation between the two countries would grow further.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has also greeted President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in another message.

The Prime Minister expressed her confidence that the existing bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two countries would be further strengthened.



A sequence of drama 'Bahaman' staged at the Central Shaheed Minar by Bangladesh Theatre yesterday in observance of Amar Ekushey. — Star photo

Bulgarian envoy presents credentials

The newly-appointed Bulgarian Ambassador to Bangladesh, Dimitar Alexiev Bojilov, presented his credentials to President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban yesterday, reports UNB.

Accepting the credentials, President Biswas hoped that both countries would make all out efforts for increasing the level of economic co-operation and volume of trade for their mutual benefit.

He said Bangladesh and Bulgaria share views on many regional and international issues and "we're watching with interest the socio-economic improvements in Bulgaria."

The President mentioned about the success of the democratic government of Bangladesh in achieving significant progress in food production, foreign exchange balance, export earnings and in controlling the inflation.

Presenting his credentials, Ambassador Bojilov said that the existing co-operation between the two countries would develop and strengthen for promoting peace, prosperity and more economic relation.

Earlier, on arrival the envoy was given a guard of honour by the President Guard Regiment. He took salute and inspected the guard.



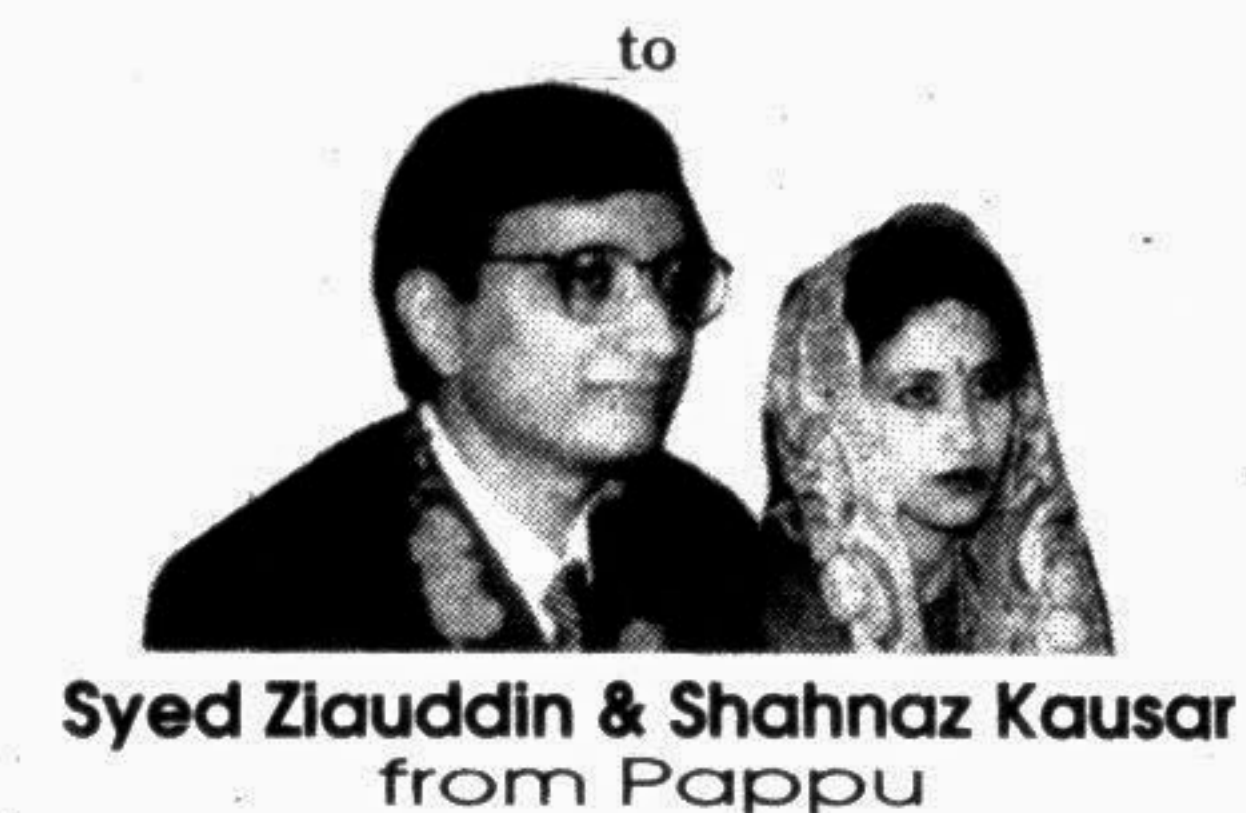
A two-day ranger council of the Bangladesh Girl Guides was inaugurated at its national headquarters in the city yesterday. — Star photo

32 arrested on various charges

Police rounded up 32 people from different parts of the city in the last 24 hours, reports UNB.

Happy Birthday
to
JOY
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away from home
Amma & Baba

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Syed Ziauddin & Shahnaz Kausar from Pappu

Dia

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