

Dhaka Book Fair 2006 begins today

WAHIDA MITU

The 12th Dhaka Book Fair-2006 under the banner "Books for peace and development" is expected to be inaugurated at midday, today at the Shilpakala Academy by the Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia.

The fair, organised together by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Jatiya Grantha Kendra, will go on till January 18.

Yet organising officials fear that the fair will not attract many visitors because of the countrywide bomb blasts and the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha.

Even the publishers showed little interest in taking part in the fair. To encourage more publishers to apply for stalls, the deadline for bookings was extended three times.

"It is true that we had to call publishers three times to coax them to book stalls," said one of the high officers on condition of anonymity.

"I have never faced such a situation in my long years of experience here," he said.

He said the repeated bomb blasts throughout the country is responsible for this situation.

But Shafiqul Islam, director, National Book Centre said Eid-ul-Azha in midst of the fair is main cause for such a situation.

"Eid this year falls during the period the fair takes place and most staff members

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and workers of different publications will be on leave making the chances of participating in the fair slim," said Islam. He added however that leading publishers would take part.

The fair would be closed for three days during the Eid holiday, said officials.

The organisers arranged 108 stalls of which 96 stalls have already been booked.

Of the 83 participating institutions four are foreign stalls including the British Council, World Bank, National Book Trust of India (NBTI) and Iran Cultural Centre. In 2005 the total participants were 115 and the number of foreign stalls were only three.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has requested the Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure tight security in and around the premises.

"We will take steps to ensure the public safety," said one of the high official of the Cultural Affairs Ministry.

It is expected that members from the Detective Branch (DB), Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), police, and ansar will be provide round-the-clock security at the fair.

Publishers, however, have high hopes of good sells like the previous years in spite of the present situation.

"We should move forward amid the country-wide anxieties," said Monirul Haque, publisher, Ananya Prakashani adding that they look forward to good sales.

As an International Book fair there is no limit in choice of language in selling and exhibiting books, added Haque.

"However, a "Subcommittee on Policy Implementation and Security" and constant vigilance team will check for any anti liberation, anti independence and anti religion books at the fair," said the director.

The fair authorities have restricted the sale of one publisher's book in another publisher's stall. Publishers decided to give 20 percent as commissions on the sale of each book as had been done in the previous years.

The fair remain open for visitors from 2:30pm to 10:30pm on weekdays and 11:00am to 8:30pm on holidays. The Entry fee is priced at Tk two.

Local courier services still unreliable

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

City dwellers are frustrated with the unreliable services that most local courier services provide.

Victims of such services complained that letters and parcels do not reach the destinations within the specified time frame, sometimes causing loss to the sender and receiver at the same time.

"I had a parcel containing some valuable documents sent from Dhaka to Feni. The service provider assured me that it would reach its destination, the next day. But the delivery was actually made four days later," said Munir Hossain, a resident of Kamalapur.

Hossain said he had to make a number of calls to the courier service office and went through a period of anxiety till the parcel had reached its destination.

"When I asked the agent for an explanation, he said that there was a problem on the way, and said I should not worry anymore as the parcel eventually reached its destination," complained Hossain.

Others had worse experiences. "I sent some

valuable items and a letter to my parents in Bikrampur. The parcel disappeared and I have not been able to trace it yet," said Motiur, a Dhaka University student.

Motiur asked the courier service agents to trace the package but they were of little help.

"I later learnt that the package went missing from the passenger bus, which was used as a carrier by this service," said Motiur.

He was compensated with Tk 1,000 by the courier service.

"I still feel the letter that I had written to my mother and the memorable items, are worth millions to me," he said.

Some users are not as fortunate as Motiur. A majority of these courier services lack the financial base and the goodwill to compensate customers.

City dwellers alleged that most courier services are inept in carrying out their business.

"Most services are just small businesses with very little working capital and to balance the expenditure they reserve space in passenger buses and heavy trucks that ply the highways regularly," said Rafiqul Alam, from Green Road.

Alam has been using the services of local and zonal couriers over the last five years. He said that reliability and efficiency of these services are questionable.

Some customers also alleged that the agents and attendants hired by these services are rude to customers.

"I went to the office of a service last month. The attendant there continued doing other things while I waited for over 10 minutes. When I finally demanded for some service, he was very rude to me," said Nilufar Haque, a city-dweller.

Authorities of a few courier services said that the activities of these services are illegal and are exploiting customers.

"Customers should be informed of probable accidental delays, the minimum and maximum length of delivery and other details about the service, before engaging in any transaction with them," said an agent of a courier service at Kalabagan, under condition of anonymity.

Others pointed out that most of these services are not members of the Courier Service Association of Bangladesh (CSAB).

"Members of the association have to provide a certain standard of service to its customers," said a member of the association.

CSAB is affiliated to Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and approved by the Commerce Ministry.

Customers and authorities of better courier services alleged that these 'low-grade' services are getting away with all the mistakes they make, because of the non-existence of a monitoring body. "We had applied to the concerned authorities for the formulation a specific code by which all courier services should abide," said Hafizur Rahman Pulok, Deputy Managing Director, Sundarban Courier services and a member of the CSAB.

But such a code is yet to be formulated and implemented by the governing authorities.

"We are hoping that the authorities will soon implement this code, which would facilitate the activities of honest and sincere courier services and help to maintain their reputation through standard services to customers," said Rahman.

12x3

12x2

4x3

8x3