

Saint Abdur Rahim Rizvi, came to Dhaka in 1730 from Kashmir via Murshidabad. He belonged to the sect of Nakhshbandi. He set his ashram in a wasteland and later the area became a dense habitat of Muslims. As people honoured him by calling "Mia Sahib," the area became known as "Mia Sahiber Maidan".

## Ekushey book fair opens Friday

### Tickets, stringent rules introduced; number of stalls down; food courts ousted; books to be costly

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Ekushey Boi Mela, the largest and most anticipated annual book fair in the country, will open Friday on the Bangla Academy premises.

Last-minute preparation for the month-long fair is going on in full swing while publishing houses and printing presses are working round the clock to produce their latest material at the fair for book enthusiasts. However work of a good number of stalls was still unfinished till filing this report yesterday.

Bangla Academy, the organiser of the fair, will introduce a few new rules and features to the Ekushey book fair this year.

For the first time since the inception of the fair in 1972, each visitor will have to purchase a Tk 2 ticket to enter the fairground. Season pass will also be available for Tk 50 each. There will be 16 ticket booths near TSC building and Doyel Chatter. Tickets will also be sold at bookstores at New Market, Aziz Super Market, Bailey Road and Dhanmondi.

Murshid Anwar, Deputy Director, Bangla Academy said, "The ticket system is only experimental. We hope that it will keep the unwanted elements out of the fairground who is often responsible for chaos inside the fair."

"Proceeds from the sale of tickets will go to the research fund of Bangla Academy", he added.

However, this traditionally free-for-all event seemingly turning into a commercial venture raised eyebrows among a number of concerned citizens.

"It goes totally against the very spirit of the fair," said an elderly academician who has been visiting the fair regularly for over three decades.

"The fair was aimed at encouraging budding writers, struggling publishers and upcoming booklovers," he said, adding "The very logic that intro-



Although the Ekushey Book Fair is scheduled to open on Friday, many stalls are still unfinished. The picture was taken on Saturday.

duction of a Tk 2 ticket would ensure peace at the fair is really funny."

"How do you take it for granted that bad elements cannot effort to buy Tk 2 tickets or those without tickets are anti-socials," he posed.

Farid Ahmed, a proponent of the ticket system and owner of Shomoy Prokashan, said, "We think it's a positive effort. It will help us find out exactly how many people visit the fair every year -- the data we never had. It's important to know this for the improvement of the print industry as well as the Ekushey Boi Mela."

Visitors will have to form six lines to enter the fairground through two entrances. There

will be a separate exit for them. Around 30 food stalls will be allotted right across the Bangla Academy complex -- on Suhrawardy Udyan. Tickets will not be required to enter this area and public restrooms will be located in this section.

A statue of late Chittaranjan Saha, the founder of the Ekushey book fair and Muktohdhara Prokashani, will be featured at the fair. Total number of stalls will be fewer than last year. "Some of the interested participants were disqualified this year due to the introduction of strict rules in the selection criteria", said deputy director Murshid Anwar.

Out of around 380 intending participants this year, the acad-

emy approved 148 publishing houses to set up around 252 stalls, government and semi-government agencies 44 stalls and NGOs and various media groups a few more stalls. The total number of stalls this year will be around 370. Whereas last year, there were around 412 stalls at the fair.

The academy officials hoped that the reduced number of stalls would help them to be more organised this year. "Every year the mela premise seem crammed with too many stalls and people in a little space turning it into a chaotic place. Visitors will experience a cleaner fair this year. Stall distribution will also be orderly", Anwar added.

Lottery for stall distribution

took place yesterday.

The academy will hand down stiff penalties to the participants for violating rules laid out by the academy or selling pirated materials, the academy officials added.

Publishers that have produced 60 authentic publications of creative literature, science and research work or at least 15 titles last year were selected to set up stalls at the fair this year.

Besides, publishers that violated various rules during the book fair last year were not entitled to take part in the fair this year.

The stall allottees that failed to open their stalls on the opening day of the fair last year, abruptly left the fair before its closure, or did not pay their rents have also

been barred from taking part in the fair, said the academy officials.

Osman Gani of Agamee Prokashani, who is a member of the Ekushey Boi Mela committee, said, "The selection process has always been influenced by outsiders in past years. The publishing houses that had been involved in the malpractice (before) have been excluded from the fair this year."

"The tough selection process will benefit genuine publishing houses which play an important role in the printing and publishing industry of Bangladesh," he added.

Nazrul Islam Bahar of Shikha Prokashani, another member of the mela committee, said, "The rules were tough every year, but those could never be enforced properly. The rules need to be enforced strictly until the end of the event."

To a few publishers, however, the rules are a bit unreasonable.

Ashok Roy Nandi, owner of Naboyog Prokashani, said, "Many publishers publish lots of new titles every year, but those are not necessarily of good quality. However, there are houses that produce high quality books, but their number (of titles published) might be quite a few. What will happen to them?"

"The book fair is also a perfect opportunity for new publishers to flourish. They should be given the chance even if they don't have enough publications," he added.

Commenting on the matter, the academy officials said the publishers and authors who could not get allotment at the fair would be able to display their publications at a special stall set up by the academy.

Meanwhile because of increased printing and binding cost books are likely to be costlier at the book fair this year. Besides, customer commission has also been reduced to 25 percent from the usual commission of 30 percent.

### city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"Dhaka University has been the conscience of the country and none can suppress that with might. Whenever the university community saw an injustice or a move against democracy anywhere in the country they protested and the practice will go on."*

-- Prof Anwar Hossain

One of the four freed DU teachers and general secretary of Duta said at the 'solidarity rally' at the foot of Aparajeyo Bangla after he and his colleagues were freed, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"The government calculations have gone wrong. It probably wanted to punish the teachers, but failed for pressure from different quarters."*

-- M Hafizuddin Khan

A former adviser to a caretaker government told a reporter after the four DU teachers were convicted and then released, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"But I can't talk much, it's very painful for me to talk now."*

-- Rafiqul Islam Sujon

A detained DU student released last week told a reporter alleging torture during detention because of which he was having breathing difficulties, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"I have become a villain. Yet my 28-year business profile will show that I am a clean businessman. I have contributed to the national economy. I have stakes in the oil, gas and power sectors. When a new government comes, it consults with me and I try to help it to bring in reforms. That's why it is not right to make me a villain."*

-- Azam J Chowdhury

Industrialist

Told reporters at a city hotel in an attempt to dispel 'wrong perception' about the case he filed against Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina and her cousin for allegedly taking Tk 2.99 as extortion from him for awarding a 210MW power project contract, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Two months ago when my son called to enquire about current status of the investigation, a CID official told him they were yet to start the job."*

-- Asma Kibria

Wife of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria told a reporter expressing frustration with the pace of supplementary probe into the killing of her husband three years ago, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Azam J Chowdhury has started talking. Many will start talking like him when the time and opportunity comes."*

-- Motia Chowdhury

AL Presidium Member

Said at the meeting of Hawkers' League, on Friday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

*"The way EC [Election Commission] is moving ahead all the confusions will be removed within a few months."*

-- ATM Shamsul Huda

Chief Election Commissioner

Told reporters, on Wednesday. Source: Jugantor

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

## Yellow 3-wheelers soon to ensure fair fares

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Yellow CNG run three-wheelers are set to hit city streets by the end of June this year.

Painted in the traditional yellow, this new breed of auto rickshaws will be driven by their owners. They will carry 'self-driven vehicle' signs and follow standard CNG fare policies.

"As the owners themselves will drive these auto rickshaws, they would not have to pay any rental fees. So, the drivers would not be able to charge higher fares with the excuse of higher rental charges," said an official from the operations department of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

Five thousand of these new auto rickshaws will be imported in the private sector to join the current green coloured fleet of

around 13,000 plying the city streets. BRTA will provide registration for each of the new three-wheelers.

As the whole process will take around three months, the authorities believe that the new auto rickshaws should hit the streets by the end of June.

According to sources at BRTA, advertisements will be published in newspapers to hold a lottery. Winners of the lottery will get to buy an auto rickshaw from any importer. However, only valid three-wheeler driving licence holders will be allowed to participate in the lottery.

A contender of the lottery will need to collect an application form for a fee of Tk 50. The applicant will also need to submit a refundable Tk 20,000 deposit in pay order with the

application form. Around 10,000 application forms have already been prepared by BRTA, sources said.

BRTA officials said the registration process would begin soon after the advertisements are published. Applicants will have to submit their forms within 30 days following the publication of the advertisement.

No one will be allowed to submit more than one application. The distribution process will be carried out through lottery to maintain transparency.

"If any applicant is found to be submitting multiple applications, they will be declared ineligible," said Humayun Rashid, director (operations) of BRTA.

A set of distinctive terms and

conditions will be applicable to these newly imported yellow auto rickshaws.

The owners may face punitive measures if hired drivers run the vehicles. Also, the owners of these vehicles will not be allowed to sell the vehicles or hand over the registration to someone else before operating the vehicles for three years.

"We are trying to ensure that that no one can sell the vehicles at a high price after winning the lottery and make a profit out of it," said Humayun Rashid. "Earlier, auto rickshaws were sold at double the original price. This practice needs to be stopped."

The authorities are optimistic that the new initiative will remove some of the chaos in the CNG auto rickshaw sector and reduce public sufferings in Dhaka.

Owners and drivers however expressed mixed reactions to the new initiative.

Nurul Islam from Goran who owns 10 auto rickshaws, thinks the decision to register vehicles against driving licences is unfair.

"They [government] promised the owners that the fresh lot of CNG auto rickshaws would be allotted. Now they have decided to allot the new auto rickshaws to the drivers," said Islam.

"I wonder where they would find the money to buy an auto rickshaw," he added.

Nurul Islam's views were echoed by a number of drivers as well.

"Most of us [drivers] have to live on a day-to-day basis. For majority of the drivers, putting down 20,000 taka would be

difficult, if not impossible," said Idris Ali, an auto rickshaw driver from Shajahanpur.

Different drivers' associations however welcomed the decision.

BRTA had forwarded a proposal to the communications ministry for an increase in the number of CNG-run three-wheelers considering its high demand earlier in May last year.

Later, the government enforced a revised fare policy for CNG-run three-wheelers in a bid to cut back the harassment by the drivers and reduce public sufferings.

However, passengers continue to suffer as drivers of CNG-run three-wheelers continue to charge higher than the metered fare, ignoring the recent string of measures taken by the authorities.

## THREE FOOTBRIDGES AWAIT OPENING



The much-needed footbridge at Bangla Motor crossing is nearing completion (left). Two other bridges at Paribagh and near the chief adviser's office in front of the old airport will also open soon.