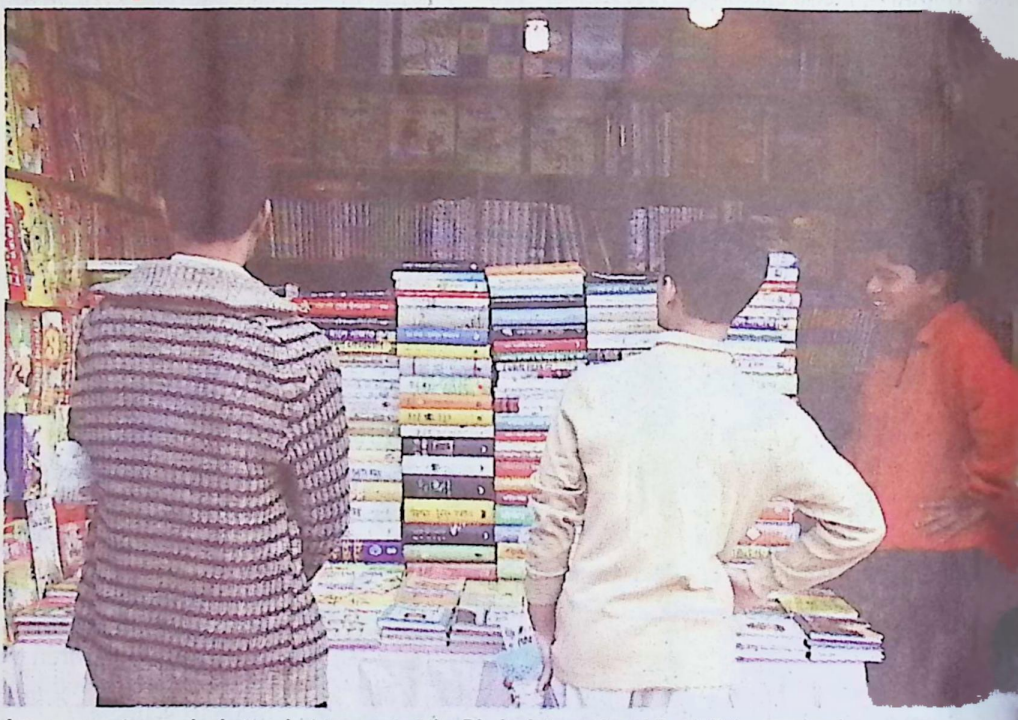
Another Generic Affair

The Dhaka International Book Fair is yet to develop a distinctive character



Arrangements may be better, but turn out at the Dhaka International Book Fair remains low.

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Book fairs are always a good way to try and boost the ever dwindling reading habit of the people. They also create opportunities for authors, publishers and readers. The National Book Centre (NBC), under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, has been organising the Dhaka Book Fair at different locations in the city since 1995 but has failed to generate the expected response of such of big event. This year, the fair has been organised at the Dhaka University Central Playground with a high expected turnout of readers, writers and publishers. Moreover, to add an international dimension, the book fair has been re-titled as Dhaka International Book Fair. Though the title and venue has been changed, there is still a long way to go to make the book fair a popular one.

With 150 publishing houses participating, this year's theme for the fair is 'Book for a Peaceful World'. Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed inaugurated the 15-day Dhaka International Book Fair '08 on December 15. The exhibition will remain open for the visitors from 11 am to 8 pm on working days and from 11 am to 8:30 pm on holidays. The entry fee for the fair has been fixed at Tk 5 per person while schoolchildren will have free access. Leading book publishers of the town such as Shahitya Prakash, Pathak Shomabesh, Anya Prokash, The University Press Limited, Muktodhara, Samay Prokashon, Dibya Prokashoni, Shondesh, Bidya Prokash, Moula Brothers and Gyankosh government organisations and NGOs have been displaying and selling books at the fair. A good number of publishers such as Meena and World of Children's Books have come with books for children. Another feature of the fair is that many publishers are displaying and selling Islamic books.

To ensure participations of foreign publishers, the organisers tried to make contacts through the foreign ministry but did not get much response. Except the local offices of the British Council and cultural wings of Chinese and Iranian Embassies, only a few publishers from India are participating at the fair. Except Vishva Bharati and Punshcho, all of the Indian publishers have come here not to sell books, rather to popularise Indian books and to create local agents of the publishers.

Though the publishers claim that this year's arrangement is better than previous ones, it cannot be said that the book fair has attained popularity amongst the publishers, writers and readers. Apart from the holidays, the turnout has been quite poor. And most of the visitors do not buy books rather go there just for holiday entertainment, since there is a dearth of outdoor entertainment in the city. Such visitors either mingle with themselves on the playground or listen to discussion of the writers at the book fair premises. More than discussion, the cultural function that takes place everyday at the open stage attracts such viewers.

No publisher has come to the fair with new releases exclusively for the fair, though, the key target of the