we preferred to call it a festival to celebrate togetherness," she says, adding that the festival, being held for the second time, was first held in 2001 by the Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature.

The two-day long festival was divided into 13 sessions where the writers focused on how literature reveals historical truths and bridges the gap created through historic events. The discussions and papers presented during the festival mainly focused on the great Indian partition, while they also emphasised on broader issues and the diversified linguistic nature of South Asia, the main causes of mistrust among the nations in the subcontinent being rooted in the beginning of colonial era. In fact, the fabric of our polity today is the history that is woven with traumatic events from both pre and post-1947 periods. The British Empire in India found their main stake in the concept of community along religious lines. And thus, they decided to divide the great Indian nation to suit their purpose.

The curiosity to know more about this topic is what drew the most people to the session "Historical Fault Lines and Reconciliation." The discussion held between two legendary Bangla litterateurs, poet Shamsul Haque of Bangladesh and Samaresh Syed Majumdar of India was moderated by Syed Badrul Ahsan, executive editor of The Daily Star. Shamsul Haque presented his personal recollection on the partition, while Majumdar stated that borders "cannot divide language or the emotions of a human being," adding that he was proud to write in Bangla, the language for which people laid down their lives. The day ended with poetry recitations in different languages. The writers were trying to move on and find ways to address past trauma through literature and literary interactions across and within borders.

Renowned Indian publisher Ritu Menon and intellectual property rights specialist Barrister ABM Hamidul Mishbah spoke about South Asia's publication challenges and opportunities with the publisher and Managing Director of University Press Limited (UPL) Publisher, Mohiuddin Ahmed, at the session titled "Publishing in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities."

Ritu Menon criticised the imperialistic attitude of international publishers in South Asia and explained how foreign publishers were still monopolising national and regional markets. She also cited the incapability of publishers in this region and poor English readership as one of South Asian countries' problems to strengthen their publishing industry. Despite South Asia's inability to capitalise on its potential, multinational publishing houses have been cashing in on the region, generating a major chunk of their revenue since colonial times. While explaining the prospect of co-publishing she said, "Compared to the other regions, South Asia has a large readership".

In the same session, while talking about Intellectual Property Right (IPR), Hamidul Mishbah talked about establishing a new court in the country which would address IPR issues. He said, "We have specific courts for almost all kinds of criminal activities. But we do not have a single court that addresses IPR issues. We are working on it to uphold the rights of a writer."



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

***From left*, Indian publisher Ritu Menon, Professor Fakrul Alam, Barrister Hamidul Mishbah, and UPL Managing Director Mohiuddin Ahmed at the session, "Publishing in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities".**

At every session, speakers echoed Ritu Menon's remark on English readership. It is quite true that English has become a dominant, reckoning force in the publishing world as well as in the world of literary recognition and awards. So to improve our position in world literature, we should be aware that there are many challenges lying ahead for South Asian writers. It goes without saying that SAARC can bring a positive change in the hegemonic role that the West wields through a major part of history.