

Biggest event for booklovers returns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There was something special about the day. One could sense it in the air, streets and from people.

A sense of happiness prevailed and it could be felt among the crowd gathered in front of Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan in the capital's Dhaka University area.

As soon as the gates to the month-long Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela (book fair) opened around 5pm yesterday, earnest booklovers entered the premises.

Earlier, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the book fair, country's largest book festival, at Bangla Academy around 3pm.

Though the archways are yet to be set up, a number of security personnel including police and Rab were seen maintaining security.

Like previous years, commercial publishing houses have set up stalls at Suhrawardy Udyan while stalls of government offices, autonomous and other social organisations are on the academy premises.

Being the first day of the fair, not all the stalls were opened or decorated completely, but that did not hamper the festivity among the youths who, clad in bright clothes, thronged the stalls.

"We hope the remaining works will be completed by today," said Tanvir Kabir of Ananna Prokashoni.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jalal Ahmed, organising member secretary of the fair, said publishers had requested an extra day to complete the works.

As the evening set in, bookworms in groups started arriving at the biggest congregation of readers, writers, poets and publishers.

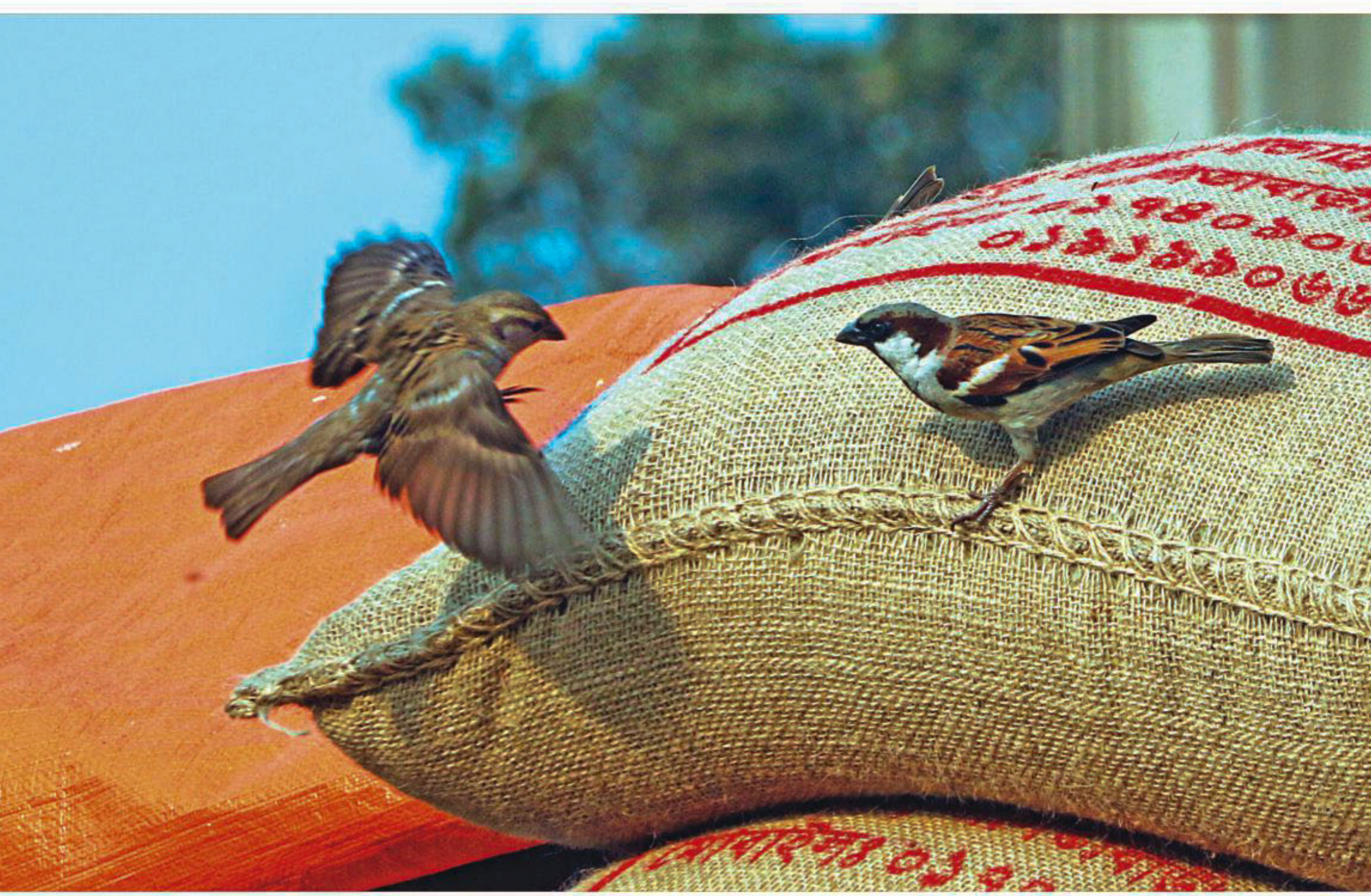
Anika Tahsin, a student of DU's geography department, was seen browsing through books at different stalls. She said yesterday being the first day, she was yet to make up her mind.

Meanwhile, many visitors were seen wearing masks to avoid dust. When asked, Jalal Ahmed said they would start spraying water from today.

Yesterday, the academy did not provide any list of new arrivals.

Today, a discussion on "Bijoy: Bhasha Andolan Theke Muktijuddho" will be held at the main stage of Bangla Academy at 4pm.

The fair will remain open from 11am to 9pm on the weekends and from 3pm to 9pm on weekdays. On February 21 (International Mother Language Day), the fair will



Sacks of rice left in front of a shop at Karwan Bazar market may not be an interesting sight, but for these sparrows it was a treat as the "feathery friends" utilised this opportunity to feed on grains. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Foreign minister to fly to New Delhi on maiden official trip

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen will travel to New Delhi, India on February 7-8 for a high-level meeting with his counterpart Sushma Swaraj, where the two countries will discuss a variety of issues ranging from water-sharing to intense security cooperation.

Momen, during his maiden overseas trip as the foreign minister, will co-chair the fifth meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) with the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Swaraj.

During the visit, the foreign minister is expected to meet Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Officials of both sides are working on the details of the visit and agenda for discussion.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Over 21 lakh students sitting for SSC and equivalent exams today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 21 lakh students are sitting for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent examinations this morning across the country.

The exams will begin at 10am at 3,497 centres. Students will have to take seats 30 minutes prior to the tests.

This year, a total of 21,35,333 students -- 10,70,441 boys and 10,64,892 girls -- from 28,682 institutions have registered for the exams.

The number of examinees rose by more than 1.03 lakh from last year.

The written tests will end on February 26, while the practical tests would be held from February 27 to March 14.

Of the examinees, 17,00,102 are sitting for the SSC exams under eight general education boards while 3,10,172 for Dakhil exams under the Madrasa Education Board, and 1,25,059 for vocational exams under the Bangladesh Technical Education

Board. A total of 434 students will take the exams from eight overseas centres as well.

Education Minister Dipu Moni will visit an examination centre at Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Government Secondary School in Dhaka's Ashkona area.

At a pre-examination briefing on Thursday, she insisted that there would be no incident of question paper leak during the public exams this time.

She called upon the teachers, students and guardians not to pay heed to any rumour.

No one except centre secretary will be allowed to carry mobile phones in the centres.

The coaching centres across the country have been asked to remain closed from January 27 till February 27 to facilitate proper holding of SSC and equivalent exams.

Meanwhile, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members detained two persons from Gazipur for their

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

DNCC to revamp 26 parks and playgrounds

Plans focus on inclusiveness

HELEMUL ALAM

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) is working to revamp 26 parks and playgrounds of the capital, with an eye on inclusiveness of people of all ages.

Among the parks, development work of four have been going on and final designs of 20 others have already been completed, said Tariq Bin Yusuf, project director of the Upgradation, Regeneration and Greening of Urban

inclusive, he said, adding that they are considering these in their designs.

"We are engaging local people in the renovation, even taking opinions of youngsters through videogames like Minecraft while preparing designs of the parks," said Istiak.

The architect said they are keeping separate spaces for the elderly and youth, setting benches following their necessities.

Older people like having a chat, for



PHOTO: VITTI STHAPATI BRINDO

A design of the park on Humayun Road in Mohammadpur.

Open Spaces initiative of DNCC, adding that tenders will be floated shortly in this regard.

Primary designs of two more -- Madhubagh Park and Mohammadpur Town Hall playground -- have been completed and final designs are being prepared, he said.

Works to revamp all the parks will be completed by December 2020, he said.

Architecture firm Vitti Sthapati Brindo has completed the designs of the 24 parks-playgrounds while Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) have done the other two.

"As we have very limited resources, we are keeping both playground and park in the same venue, where provisions for walking and playing games will be available together," said architect Istiak of Vitti.

Public spaces will have to be kept open and free for people, and have to be

which they will set up round benches in the park so that they can engage in conversations, he added.

"We are also setting up bicycle pavements in some of the bigger parks," he said.

Istiaq said they are also installing European-style sufficient lights in the parks for safety.

Iqbal Habib, another architect of Vitti, said the late DNCC mayor Annisul Huq took the initiative to revamp parks in DNCC areas.

First he took initiative to modernise three parks with DNCC's own funds, and later initiated renovation of more parks and playgrounds under another project.

Any facility that may create a division between the wealthy and the disadvantaged will not be kept, he added.

"We are also giving emphasis on post-project management which will be

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Reading aloud enhances early literacy skills

Experts say at World Read Aloud Day celebration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As soft light of the sun illuminated little faces on a tranquil weekend morning, the words they were articulating became all the more prominent. Jatiya Press Club premises on Dhaka's Topkhana Road yesterday buzzed with the slogan: "Shobdo kore poro, nibekey abishkar kori" (Let's read aloud and learn more about ourselves).

The children from different primary schools came with their guardians to celebrate the World Read Aloud Day.

Their participation in art competition, recitation and other exciting activities inside the VIP Lounge of the club made for an unusual and much welcome day at the venue.

"I have recited a poem here... My mother helped me learn this by heart," said Shorna Saha, a class IV student of Nidhu Smiriti Government Primary School.

To celebrate the day for the first time in Bangladesh, Rup Bangla -- a private advertising firm -- chalked out a series of events.

Initiated by the New York-based



Children display placards during a rally held by Rup Bangla in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club, marking World Read Aloud Day yesterday.

literacy non-profit LitWorld, World Read Aloud Day has been celebrated for the past 10 years in 173 countries.

Speaking as the chief guest, Prof AAMS

Arefin Siddique, former vice chancellor of Dhaka University (DU) said,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Quader optimistic of free, fair Ducsu polls

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday expressed optimism that the long-overdue election to Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) and hall unions will be held in a free, fair and neutral manner.

"Ducsu polls will be held in a free and fair manner so that students can exercise their franchise," he told reporters at the AL president's Dhanmondi political office in Dhaka.

He said polling centers were set up in respective dormitories in previous Ducsu elections. So, there should not be any debate over doing so now, he added.

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