

World Book Day

The World Book and Copyright Day came and passed us by rather quietly. Under the auspices of the British Council in Dhaka the day was observed in a very modest way. Its observance even could not create a few ripples of enthusiasm among the educated and the elite of society, let alone wider segments of society. Different ministries, directorates and departments are not found wanting in euphoric zeal when it comes to celebration of a far less important event or occasion. The significance of this highly important occasion however failed to impress the government functionaries. Educational institutions and other organisations of intellectual excellence also did not show much interest in marking the day.

All this perhaps highlights the diminishing role of books in our national life. The way electronic media, the visual type of them in particular, have made their aggressive entry into our drawing rooms is indicative of the new generation's preference for education and entertainment. Knowledge no longer needs to be comprehensive but is presented in a package as a recipe for obtaining degrees or overcoming the hurdles of examinations. Books have taken a back seat and so has erudition. Today's sought-after knowledge consists of mere information, hardly any interpretation, insight and expansion of mental capacity.

In a situation like this we tend to follow the West that has long been in the lead so far as technology is considered. The craze for information technology (infotech) in the shape of computer has sent many a head here on the spin. Most are in favour of a short-cut and they want to bypass the basic education and homework before taming the sprinting horse of modern information. So the books are being ignored and not everything is well on the publishing front of books. Today books have become more attractive and better made and yet they cannot weave a magical spell on their readers as they did in the past. People are reluctant to give time to this once considered best companion.

It is however a tragedy that people nowadays give a cold shoulder to this companion. Printed words still have more strength than the visual display and the accompanied narration. Why? Because pursuing knowledge is a kind of meditation that calls for pause and concentration. Imagination is lacking in the colourful display of things and events. It is precisely because of this TV and Radio programmes cannot be an alternative to books. Promotion of books can still save us from mental poverty.