

Promotion Of Books Counts

The ninth Dhaka Book Fair has began in the Parade Ground of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar on Wednesday and is scheduled to end on January 15. Clearly this yearly programme is yet to draw the attention of the public in a big way. We do not ask this fair to compete with the Ekushey book fair because the ethos associated with the event of the 21st February is something special and unrivalled. But then the Dhaka Book Fair can as well serve an important purpose.

If the Ekushey book fair's main focus is on the creative pursuit of our local writers and the country's book industry, this one has the option to bridge the gap between our literary works and those of the world. Our access to global knowledge—science literature, health, environment etc., is mostly through English language. Multi-lingual proficiency has long ceased to be viable culture for us.

Much as we may wax eloquent about our love for the language, the hard truth is that our language is yet to assimilate knowledge of pure science in its vocabulary. So to be familiar with the latest information, knowledge and research findings, we need help of a foreign language. Because of historic reasons we rely on English language. Until or unless we have developed our own language to the extent where it can be an effective carrier of the highest form of thoughts, our dependence on English will continue.

A book fair of international order which our Dhaka Book Fair ought to aim at attaining, can indeed connect us globally. So far, this book fair has not been able to perform this particular role. Clearly, the foreign publishers participating in the fair have not shown great interest in the matter. All because, we have failed to arrange the event accordingly. We are not clear about our objectives and the vision is simply missing. Those who think that the reading habit has taken a beating at the hand of electronic media, television in particular, should be alarmed. No doubt, the dawning of the information age has suddenly catapulted us to a different plane of dissemination of knowledge. But our resource constraint cannot allow us to reap the full benefit of this.

Education will depend on books and other printing materials for a long time to come. So, the promotion of books—the main aim of any book fair—must attain a new standard, different from the conventional one. No casual approach will do. The Dhaka Book Fair has indeed a unique opportunity for projecting itself as an occasion for bringing about a cultural marriage through books. The possibility of developing a different kind of publishing industry in relation to translation from and to other languages is there. Printing cost of books can be drastically reduced now. The challenge is to bring down the price of books. On this account we may possibly work out our advantages. Let the price of books come down through collaborative ventures. Even if we go by the rules of copyright and royalty, we may still get books at a much lower price. There is a need for a concerted effort for this to happen. Let us be equal to the challenge.