

Big day for booklovers

Ekushey Bô Mela opens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Crowds started to grow steadily around Bangla Academy in the capital in the winter afternoon. They stood patiently in long queues for the much-awaited Ekushey Book Fair to kick off.

As the clock struck five yesterday, booklovers made their way to the Academy premises and Suhrawardy Udyan across the road.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had earlier inaugurated the book fair.

In order to accommodate the increasing number of publishers, writers and visitors, Bangla Academy is holding the fair at Suhrawardy Udyan for the first time as well as on its premises.

"There had been a demand for long for expanding the fair's area," said Murshid Anwar, deputy director (public relations) of the Academy.

In previous years, the organisers had allowed setting up of stalls on the road beside the Academy to cater to the needs of publishers and other institutions. But it was not sufficient, he said.

This time, only public and private institutions and publishers of children's literature and little magazines have been allowed to build stalls on the Academy premises, while the other publishers have set up stalls at Suhrawardy Udyan.

Welcoming the Academy's decision to expand the fair's area, Mohammad Liaquatullah, publisher of Student Ways, said, "We have been demanding it for long."

He, however, was not happy with the arrangement of the stalls.

Mazharul Islam, publisher of Anya Prakash, said, "There might be mismanagement since the fair is being held at the Udyan for the first time. We hope to get bigger space next year for setting up pavilions."

Writer Lutfur Rahman Riton welcomed the expansion of the fair venue, and said the road adjacent to the Academy should be made

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off-limits to traffic during fair hours from 3:00pm to 9:00pm.

He also said no trees should be felled for setting up stalls at the fair.

Ahsan Dipu, a teacher at Mirpur Cantonment Public School and College, said though there are many stalls at the Udyan, it lacks the festivity and mood of the typical book fair.

"A road separates the two, and people coming to this side may not venture to the other. They will also miss the programmes on the Academy premises."

Shimuzzaman Shaon, a banker, pointed out that the stalls didn't have any numbers this time, making it difficult for visitors to locate their desired stalls.

Sales were quite good at the bookstalls at the Udyan. But the stalls of little magazines on the Academy premises couldn't draw much crowd. Besides, many stalls were yet to put books on display there.

Only yards away, a two-day poetry festival was being held at the Dhaka University library premises.

With the slogan "Kobita Sohena Danob Jatona", the 28th National Poetry Festival was inaugurated by renowned poet Syed

Shamsul Hoque yesterday.

The festival has been organised by Jatiya Kobita Parishad.

"Thirty-five guests and poets from abroad and more than 100 poets from across Bangladesh are taking part in the festival this year," said Aslam Sunny, general secretary of the Parishad.

The festival ends at 8:00pm today.