

Curtain rises on Ekushey Book Fair

Security concern looms large

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SECURITY still remains a major concern when curtain rises on Ekushey Book Fair 2016 in the capital today, with Dhaka Metropolitan Police pledging all-out safety for bloggers, writers and publishers during the month-long event.

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to inaugurate the event commemorating the historic Language Movement of 1952 at Bangla Academy, when organisers have made all preparations for the annual get-together of writers, book enthusiasts and publishers.

In the backdrop of a series of attacks on writers, publishers and bloggers, having a different opinion of what is generally accepted as the norm, publishers this year seem to be a bit wary about bringing out titles upholding independent thoughts.

Still reeling from the shock of brutal attacks on publishers of Jagriti and Shuddhaswar, both the houses are taking part in the fair but with a curtailed number of new titles by free-thinking writers.

Jagriti is the publishing house of Faisal Arefin Dipan, while Shuddhaswar is the publishing house of Ahmedur Rashid Tutul.

Dipan, who published

two books by slain science writer Avijit Roy, was hacked to death in the capital's Aziz Super Market on October 31, a few hours after another of Avijit's publishers, Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, and two other writers came under similar attack in the capital's Lalmatia.

Although offices of the both publishing houses were sealed off as crime scenes, people of the two publishing houses have published several books, braving fear of further attacks.

'We will publish new books and keep promoting the writers as we did earlier,' said Alauddin, manager of Jagriti. The publishing house has got a three-unit stall at the fair.

Shuddhaswar is planning to bring at least four new titles, much lower than previous two years. The publishing house will bring out books written by writer-bloggers Ranadipam Basu and Tareq Rahim, both sustained injuries along with Tutul in the same attack.

Shuddhaswar has also got a three-unit stall at the fair.

Yet another nagging concern for the publishers is the availability of pirated books in and outside the fair venue at Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan when

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stern measures have been warned against such illegal practice. Such warnings over the last three years, however, brought no result.

Academic and Creative Publishers Association of Bangladesh president Osman Gani, also Agamee Prakashani publisher, said some dishonest stall owners sell pirated books at the fair.

The fair on Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan premises is still getting bigger in terms of the number of participating publishing houses, new titles, venue as well as business every year.

This year the authorities have allotted 651 stalls to

the 401 publishing houses and organisations while the number of stalls was 565 for 353 organisations in 2015 and 517 for 299 in 2014.

'This year's book fair is the largest so far with over about 5 lakh square feet area while it was over 2.50 lakh square feet in 2015,' said Bangla Academy director general Shamsuzzaman Khan.

In the last five years, the book fair venue on at least three occasions was extended to the street in front of academy or to Suhrawardy Udyan, to accommodate more participants as well as have more breathing space for book lovers.

The number of new books

arriving at the book fair is also increasing every year as a total of 3,700 books arrived at the fair in 2015, while the figure was 2,959 in 2014 and 3,070 in 2013.

Publishers also hinted that the number of new titles would increase this year.

Academic and Creative Publishers Association of Bangladesh president Osman Gani, also proprietor of Agamee Prakashani, said the number of books would be increasing as number of readers and writers was going up.

The total turnover of the fair is also on the rise every year.

According to estimates of the book fair committees, the

combined sales in 2015 fair was about Tk 21.95 crore, while it was Tk 16.50 crore in 2014 and Tk 10.15 crore in 2013.

The fair time has, however, been curtailed by one hour. It will now open at 3:00pm and continue till 8:00pm. Till last year, it was between 3:00pm and 9:00pm.

Two foreign Bangla language experts — Joe Winter from the United Kingdom and Ribek Martin from the Czech Republic — will also attend the opening ceremony which would be presided over by the academy president, Professor Emeritus Anisuzzaman.