

Books here... Books there... Books everywhere!

Written by Natnael Yebio and Asmait Fustumbrhan
Wednesday, 30 March 2016 01:51



Expo March 25th 2016, 4:30 p.m. the inauguration to the 15th installation of the annual Eritrean Book fair starts. The ceremony is opened by kids from the Yirgealem Kindergarten harmoniously singing to the crowd. Cheers, whistles and rounds of applause were what followed for the kids as they finished their act and walked off the stage.

A much older cluster of individuals; this time teenagers from the Wari Cultural troupe donning matching squared red, blue and black shirts walked into the stage and amazed the attendance. The crowd filled with Government officials, diplomats as well as invited guests where simply moved and without noticing themselves began moving their heads, hands and feet in synchronized fashion to the catchy tunes sang by the group. This was the Eritrean Book Fair!

Ever since its first installations in 2002, the Eritrean Book fair has been growing tremendously; from being a local affair in its first couple of years to being a country wide spectacle.

Fourteen years on the book fair is inaugurating its 15th installation at the expo grounds. The seriousness with which such an important national event is held is self-evident to its coordination. The book fair is one of the most important events of the Ministry of Education. And

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each year, the event is carried out under different themes in the hope to raise awareness about books, reading and, more importantly, to give an ideal launching opportunity to new writers as well as publishing companies.

Thirteen years of raising awareness about books and their positive impact on individuals, society and a nation as a whole has hit its epitome; as levels of books published over the years have considerably increased, individuals are being encouraged to take the path to self proclamation of being published writers, if not, most of this unprecedented success is credit to the annual book fair held in Eritrea.

Now it is time to embrace this momentum and stride forward towards achieving maximum gain from this long but successful campaign. Raising awareness has been completed. Now it is time to coordinate our numerous publishing companies with our scholars as well as previous up and coming new writers to produce appropriate books for successful education. Clearly, without successful education, our citizen's ability to build a prosperous competitive nation will cease to exist.

Knowledge is power... power in weakness, power in journey, and power in innovation and as such power in every aspect of life. It was only when human beings started to enlighten themselves that they started to conquer the world and its nature. When human beings started to learn about their environment and started to increase their abilities to explore; did they start to embark along the path of astonishing development.

Stage by stage humans went on to read, write and examine. Consequently, as a result of centuries of endeavor invested in acquiring knowledge. Today, we have developed a world driven by education.

Knowledge can be acquired through different means. One of these means is reading. Knowledge gained through reading which is the most powerful, say experts. Why? Because reading gives you the opportunity to easily access the world itself. Access to the world, where the writer himself had invested time putting to finite words and pages but infinite wisdom. Books have the extraordinary power to take you out of yourself and into someone else's mind set, so for a while at least you look at the world through different eyes. That can be enlightening, raffling with unfamiliar ideas can help clarify your own thinking and it can show blind spots in the way you might have been looking at the world.

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The biggest resource Eritrea has is its human resources. Thus, developing its human resources has been the nation's key goal. Education in itself is never enough. Hence, increasing the reading habits of citizens is partly needed to achieve the aforementioned goal.

That is where the annual book fair comes into play. Not only does it raise awareness, it signifies how much reading is important not only to the individual but the nation as a whole.

“Appropriate books for successful education” is this year's theme. If the nation's educational system is going to be successful; it has to be backed up by appropriate books. This will better help to assess and examine books that are specifically published to assist students in their studies.

The event will be hosting different programs. Publishing companies and individual writers will introduce their services and their books to the participants. The event will further be reinforced by different student debates, general knowledge question and answer competitions, reading awareness workshops and prize awarding ceremony. Most importantly, over the coming week, students accompanied by their head-teachers from every school located in the Central region will get a chance to attend the book fair.

In this year's book fair, over 140 publishing companies, embassies as well as authors are participating in the main event. Certainly, the event gives a chance to those who are actively involved in the book industry, such as writers, publishers, distributors, book clubs, schools, and libraries, to showcase their endless collection of books.

Moreover, the event is proudly displaying about sixty new books written by Eritreans. The event which is open to everyone is also exhibiting previously written books. These books alongside with the new ones are on sale at a very fair price.

Books should be affordable! As such the Eritrean book fair is the perfect opportunity to get good books at reasonable prices. During the event books will be sold at 30% discount. “This will encourage parents to buy books for their children” noted coordinator of the book fair Mr. Isaac Yosief with a view to further nurture the reading culture in Eritrea.

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The book fair is not only a local affair. For years the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) has also been showing its trade in the regions of the South, Gash Barka, Northern Red Sea, Southern Red Sea, and Anseba, and, this year, the regional book fair will be consequently held in all these regions from April 8th to April 10th.

Above all, “increasing the culture of reading and expanding the book industry” is the main goal to achieve, as such concerning governmental organizations and stakeholders are using relevant subsidiaries as well as installing different programs to promote a culture of reading, said Mr. Isaac.

Finally, the habit of reading is something that you develop over time through reading and gaining access to books, it is not something that is inherited and as such we should all read. The Eritrean book fair tells a story... A story of the power books have, to connect us across political, geographical, cultural, social, religious divides. It is a tale of the potential, human beings have to work together and it is a testament to the extraordinary times we live in.