

Book fair puts Sharjah in atlas of culture

Many Indian authors participated in talks and workshops

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SHARJAH

The Sharjah International Book Fair, one of the earliest initiatives of its kind in the Gulf region, has had another successful edition. As it winds down on Saturday, what is billed as the world's third largest book fair would have attracted almost two million visitors, according to official figures, compared with last year's number of 2.31 million. The fair opened at the Sharjah Expo Centre on November 1.

For Sharjah, this is not quite a 'soft power' push. In its 36th edition this year, the fair pre-dates initiatives of its ilk that would be seen today as moves by the energy-rich economies of the Gulf region looking for diversified post-oil era options.

With the theme 'A World in My Book', the event featured 1,650 publishing houses from 60 countries. About 130 of the publishing houses were from India. More than 1.5 million books in different languages were made available at the sprawling venue.

A number of Indian authors were among the notable participants. They ranged from Vikas Swarup, Indian High Commissioner to Canada; Neel Mukherjee, who was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2014; Jairam Ramesh; Rajdeep Sardesai and Sagarika Ghose; Manu Joseph and Derek O'Brien.

Hema Malini was here, promoting her biography, *Beyond the Dream Girl*, which was penned by Ram Kamal Mukherjee and for which Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote the foreword. Asha Parekh made an appearance to present her autobiography, *The Hit Girl*, written by Khalid Mohammed.



Pride of place: A reproduction of a rare Koran manuscript at the Sharjah International Book Fair. The original has been carbon-dated to between A.D. 468 and A.D. 645. ■ SIBF

An overwhelming number of visitors on Friday, a weekly holiday on which the fair opened later than usual at 4 p.m. to run till 11 p.m., seemed to be from the Indian subcontinent.

Young readers in focus

Amid a babel of tongues, playful expatriate children flitted around, occasionally taking a giggling peek at the displayed tomes. The fair featured a number of child-friendly events, ranging from 'Young Engineers in the Making' to a 'storytelling puppet' workshop, to a watercolour art workshop and a comics exhibition. The youngest author to be featured was nine-year-old Justina Jibin from India, who presented her book, *My Imaginary World*, a sprightly collection of poems and stories.

Among the winners of the SIBF awards presented at the fair, the one for the Best International Publisher went to Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing, based in Kerala. The inaugural prize for the best work of translation, the Turjuman Award, went to Spanish publisher Editorial Verbum for its translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

The reproduction of a rare Koran manuscript was a particular highlight. On display at the University of Birmingham stand, it is a copy of the original, carbon-dated to between A.D. 468-645.

Sharjah is staking claim in as many words to being the 'Islamic cultural capital' and the 'cultural capital of the Arab world', priding in its "ever-increasing international status as a source of knowledge, positivity and ambition", as Ahmed Al-Ameri, Chairman of the Sharjah Book Authority (SBA) said. The city has been named Unesco's World Book Capital 2019.

The Sharjah Publishing City (SPC), recently inaugurated by the Ruler of Sharjah, is expected to become a destination for publishers, with a window to the global books market. As it grows, it is slated to be home to more than 500 publishing companies from around the world, with a printing capacity of a million books a day.

It will provide more than 15 million books in multiple languages through institutions and publishing houses that operate from the facility.

