

DAWN 'Great expectations' ahead of Lahore Literary Festival

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By Our Staff Reporter.

LAHORE: Prominent literati are expecting that the Lahore Literary Festival will revive the spirit of art and culture, and allow people to meet the authors they love.

"Events like this are important as they provide an opportunity to the public (avid readers) to meet those who describe the world for them in their words," says celebrated writer Mohsin Hamid.

He is a leading writer in Pakistan and among several other noted members of his community, who are taking part in the festival being held at Alhamra on Feb 23 and 24.

He says events like this set a standard. "We need to have such events in Lahore and other cities like Islamabad and Peshawar on a regular basis," he says.

Ms Tehmina Durrani is another prominent writer attending the festival and she is taking it as a great opportunity to express her views. "Twenty-three years after the publication of 'My Feudal Lord', I look forward to speaking at a public forum in my own country for the first time," she says.

Lahore has long been known as the cultural capital of Pakistan. This beautiful city has been associated with great literature, art, theater and music. The first-ever literary festival has been conceived keeping in mind the legacy of cultural heritage.

It promises to be the first step towards re-establishing Lahore as the cultural heartbeat of Pakistan and enriching the cultural experience of the city's residents by creating an institutional platform for fostering and furthering literary traditions.

In addition to book readings and panel discussions by some dignitaries of Urdu and English literature, the festival will feature exhibitions, stalls, music programmes and an array of delectable food items.

The scheduled panels, conversations and book readings include the launch of Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*; *The Holy Warrior in Pakistani Cinema* to be presented by Hameed Haroon;

Discovering Pakistan's English-Language Poetry to be moderated by the internationally acclaimed Ahmed Rashid; who knew that Rashid was also a leading young poet of the country decades ago.

The event has already confirmed a wide range of prominent writers and authors from across the globe, including Tariq Ali, Bapsi Sidhwa, Tehmina Durrani, Intizar Hussain, Mohsin Hamid, Muhammad Hanif, Zehra Nigah, Nadeem Aslam, Ayesha Jalal, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Ahmed Rashid and Musharraf Ali Farooqi.

In addition to amazing representation of the Pakistani diaspora, the festival organisers have also invited Indian literati Ila Arun, Urvashi Butalia and the most recognisable British face in South Asia, William Dalrymple.

"We are delighted to see the tremendous enthusiasm everyone has shown towards the LLF, especially the generous assistance by individuals and foundations, as well as the support of the City District Government," said Razi Ahmed, founder and CE.

"We're also working closely with schools and colleges in and around Lahore to ensure youth participation geared towards promoting literature reading and critical thinking. This will serve to revitalise the art and literary tradition of Lahore at an institutional and global platform," he added.

"We are excited about the interest and goodwill LLF has generated, and feel strongly about the programme

and the panelists we have the privilege of hosting,” said Nusrat Jamil, chairperson of LLF’s Advisory Board. “It is our hope that the LLF will reinvigorate our passion for creativity, and that all those interested in Pakistani culture - be it literature, art or music - will join us in being a part of this incredible festival.”

As a journalist, author, and political commentator, Ahmed Rashid needs no introduction. His fifth and latest book, ‘Pakistan on the Brink, The Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan’ will be discussed in a session at the inaugural Lahore Literary Festival, being held at the Alhamra Arts Centre in Lahore on 23rd and 24th February.

However, what fewer people know is that Rashid is also an avid poet.

Rashid will be sharing his passion for poetry in a panel discussion on Pakistani English poetry, ‘Discovering Pakistani English Poetry - Analysing the relative success of Pakistani English Prose to Poetry’, at the Lahore Lit Fest. Join Rashid and his fellow panelists, Henna Babar Ali, Athar Tahir, Samina Rahman, Khaled Ahmed, and Naveed Shezad, as they celebrate some of Pakistan’s earliest English poets with readings from their works, followed by a discussion asking why more Pakistanis writers today prefer prose over poetry. The session will close with each of the panelists sharing some of their own work.