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What seems like a very long time ago, I did my training to become a bookseller in a little bookshop dealing in books about films and jazz music; a tiny little shop in a cellar of a not so much frequented shopping mall in Hamburg, Germany. Now, many years later, after studying Chinese, and living in China for ten years, I find myself in Abu Dhabi, organising yet another book fair:

February. The Fair is less than a month away. With all the new projects we have introduced for this year, everyone feels under enormous pressure. The phones ring constantly. When I was living in Germany, I would start my day with a leisurely cup of coffee, while going over emails, and getting on top of things. Here in Abu Dhabi, that way of life is out of the question. The time differences with other countries means we have to hit the ground running every day – dealing with Indian and Chinese exhibitors before noon when communication with Europe can start, and then later when we can deal with America.

The Indian publishers: how we love them, but they are last minute decision makers. In 2008, we had a number of Indian publishers at the show, but they are slow to decide if they are coming this year. A colleague from Operations updates me: the Fair is completely booked (actually over booked) and the deadline for exhibitors to commit passed two months ago. But still we are blocking the space for our Indian exhibitors as their bureaucracy does not seem to allow for quick decisions...

Before noon I speak to an exhibitor in the Far East. The company he represents had wanted to stage a grand book exhibition with an extremely modern design. Just a few weeks ago they came to us and asked us to provide a space of several hundred square metres, in a prime location, of course. We tried to accommodate them - a few hundred square metres equates to a lot of money. We changed the stand layouts, and were able to allocate them a spot. Much happy murmuring on the other end of the phone.

Today, they tell me they are cancelling, for budgetary reasons. Oh well, now we will be able to make some of the exhibitors on the waiting list happy, I suppose.

Lunchtime is here and Europe comes to life. I have to call our partners from the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards. This year, in order to attract an even larger crowd to come to the Fair, we will have world renowned chefs giving cooking presentations – and we will stage an international cookbook exhibition. Has Fatimah Hall from Morocco agreed to come? Wonderful! Also Chef Wan from Malaysia has finally said yes. And some of the chefs in Abu Dhabi and Dubai have also agreed to cook, they love the idea. Great, one task down, but so many more to go...

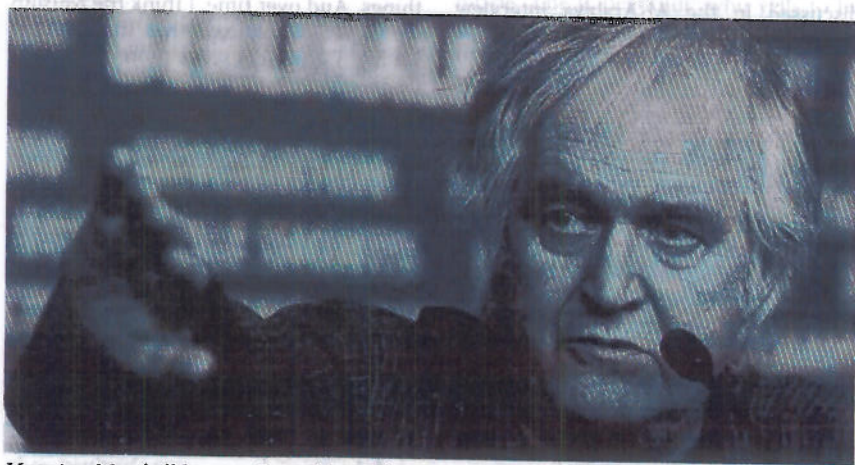
Now the Antiquarians. This year the Fair will incorporate an Antiquarian book section. The sellers come from France, UK, Netherlands, Germany and the US, and they bring rare and valuable old documents, Islamic ones as well as others. One of the sellers from the Netherlands has sent me a sample of an old map from the West he is selling. It's surrounded by unclothed angels and he wants to know whether it is possible to show this in public. I ask our partners, my local colleagues from ADACH – no problem. A smile and I move on...

The next phone call is to Henning Mankell's PA. Is he willing to speak to an interviewer in Sweden shortly? And will he consent to speak at the universities here in Abu Dhabi? I can't reach his assistant, so I will try again in the afternoon. Same call to Amitav Ghosh. First attempt and I am successful. Yes, he says, he'll be happy to speak to the journalist. Its such a pity he can only stay in Abu Dhabi for one day, he says – and I believe him. The team are now all reading Henning Mankell and Amitav Ghosh like fanatics, and we all can't wait to meet these authors in real life.

It is 6pm, and getting dark outside. Most of my colleagues have left the office, many work from home, some all night long. The office is deserted which always gives me the sense of calm I need to reply to emails, and to come up with ideas for sponsors or transportation issues.

And suddenly it is 11 pm and I need to pack up and go home. A knock at the door. Mohammed, one of my local colleagues, sticks his head round the door and grins: "Hey, you must be hungry, I brought you some food. My wife cooked it herself. Enjoy."

Only when I smell the fresh falafel do I realise how hungry I am. There was no breakfast today and we were all too busy for lunch. I want to hug him. But I don't.



Henning Mankell has confirmed he will speak at the Abu Dhabi 2009 Book Fair