had decided to have an entry fee of Tk 2 per person. According to Anwar, this was done to establish a certain level of discipline amongst the readers and regular visitors. He explains that at one point the long lines become extremely chaotic. The entry fee would have filtered out the ones who simply come to hang out every single day at the fair. However, this was withdrawn a few days before the fair began. Anwar says that the plan was to use the money earned from the tickets to create a fund, which would be utilised to support several research works carried out by the Bangla Academy.



Besides the fact that the Ekushey Boi Mela stands as a symbol of our language movement, this fair also encourages book lovers, families and friends to spend quality time together. Unfortunately, the increasing number of people, stalls and the lack of space sometimes do not allow families to stay on for very long.

"Every year we would have at least 412 stalls or more at the fair," says Anwar. "This year, the number has been reduced to 350 - 370 stalls. In any case, as some of the publishing houses have been dropped since they could not meet the required criteria and present the proper documents." A range of old books will also be re-printed by Dibboprokash, yet another well-known name in the scene, along with other contemporary books by known writers. Shohrab Hasan, the Manager of Dibboprokash appreciates the fact that this year, the Academy is strictly following the policies. "A little more discipline and better security measures at the fair would encourage more readers and book lovers to visit the stalls," he says. A good number of children's books will also be launched from this publishing house.

As the years go by, lack of space is increasingly becoming an issue with the academy, publishers and the regular fair visitors. Farid Ahmed from Somoy Publishers says that with a little more organisation, more space can be arranged for the stalls within the vicinity. "Twelve years ago, only five to six publishers, including Somoy, would book three units for a single stall at the fair," he says. "However, things are different now. For the last few years, most well known publishers have been booking three units. Moreover, Somoy amongst many others, now sell at least 700 more books than it used to once upon a time. Not only do the publishers need enough space for stalls and their books, the visitors also need to feel comfortable enough to come and visit the stalls with their family members and friends." Somoy plans to launch at least 50 books in the month of February this year.

"The books that we are launching have been roughly categorised under twelve different subjects," Anwar adds. Writers like Syed Shamsul Haque, Abdullah Abu Syed, Mohd. Zafar Iqbal, Anisul Haque and many more will have their novels, essays, fiction, science fiction and much more published from Somoy. "We will also be launching 'Putro', the last novel written by Selim Al-Deen before he died," he says. "In 2007, we had published and launched his first novel 'Shorno Boal' at the Boi Mela as well."

As the Ekushey Boi Mela season kicks off, one hopes to look forward to a healthy environment where both the writers and readers can voice out and express their thoughts from a single platform. As Franz Kafka had once said, "A book must be an ice-axe to break the seas frozen inside our soul."