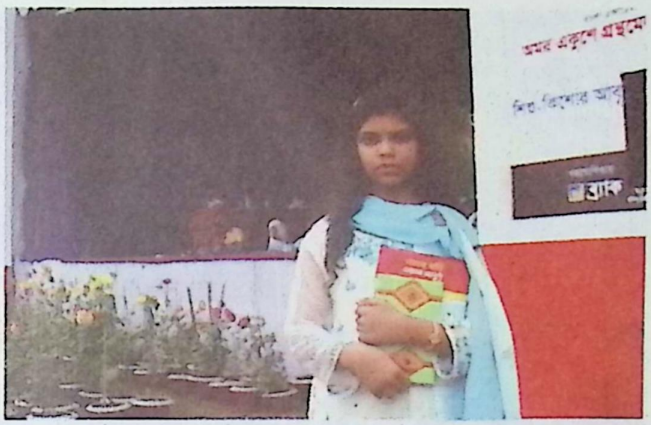
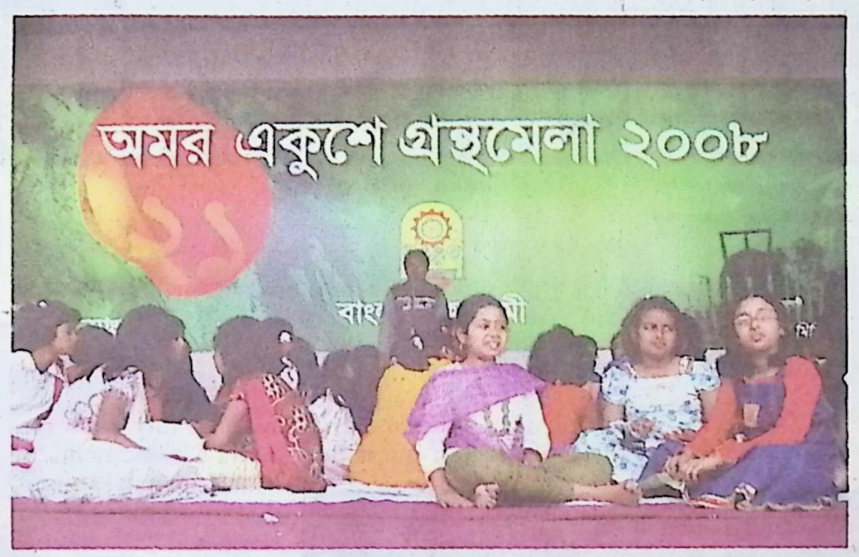


Both Araf and Ahnaf look for science fiction books at the fair.



Tasmia Rahman, posing with the books she won at the children's poetry competition.



Children waiting to recite at the competition held at the boi mela.

books from Progoti publishers, famous for introducing cut out books (popularly known as di-cut books) for children in Bangladesh. Books like 'Ghorar Golpo' - a compilation of Aesop's fables- printed on a cut out of a horse's mouth, 'Bangladesher Phul' by Mukarram Hussain, Sajjad Kabir's ghost stories for children, namely 'Bhuture Typewriter', 'Bhuter Raate Jhorer Raate', 'Bhuture Pahar' and 'Bhoyonkor Ek Raat' were some of the many books that attracted a lot of children. "We have also reprinted many of Kazi Abul Kashem's works, like 'Shobuj Chora' and 'Baeng Ustader Jolshay'," says Asrar Masud from Progoti publishers. Kashem, who died in the year 2005, is known as the first Muslim cartoonist to have participated in the language movement through his cartoons.

Masud feels that instead of dedicating two days to the children, the academy should have kept the children's corners throughout the duration of the fair like every year. "Parents and children have complained that they cannot find our stall along with the other stalls for children," says Masud. "For the last five years, we had fixed spots in the mela which attracted a lot of children."

Many, however, are happy with the two days dedicated only to children. It becomes difficult for children to move about in crowds. For instance, Ramisa and Zaima, students of Scholastica, studying in the fourth grade and KGI respectively, were seen moving from one stall to another with their mother, stacking their arms with lots of books. "My children have always been very keen on reading books," says their mother, Farzana. "They bought lots of story books, Zafar Iqbal's children's science fiction and the little one bought the Bangla version of Tom and Jerry."

Hameem Mohiuddin, working at Scholastica, feels that the boi mela should have had the children's stalls like every year. "Not all parents would have the time to actually bring the children to the fair on the designated days," he explains. "The children's corners would let them come and roam about from one children's stall to another with ease." Both his children, Ramisa Rahman, studying in the first grade at Viqarunnisa and Zahin Rahman ended up buying a good number of books.

For those who missed out on the children's day on February 15, can still catch up with the young ones on February 22. The Academy's decision will definitely encourage more children to appreciate books and the habit of reading which, according to many parents and teachers, is slowly fading away with time. ■