

## OPINIONS

## What We'd Like to See at Ekushey Boi Mela



PHOTOS: PALASH KHAN, SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED &amp; RASHED SHUMON

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For us Bangladeshis, February is the most 'literary' of all the months. That's obviously due to the Ekushey Boi Mela, the book fair that takes place throughout February at the Bangla Academy premises. New books get launched every day at the fair (at the time of writing this, the number has exceeded 1300). It's customary for publishers to bring out new titles around this time.

This year, 351 institutions are taking part in the fair, with stalls across the Bangla Academy grounds and a part of Suhrawardy Udyan. SHOUT talked to several people on what they would like to see at the fair and what they wouldn't. Here's what they told us.

"There are virtually no good comic books being sold here at the fair," said 25-year-old Iftekhar Rashed. It's noteworthy that Dhaka Comics, the popular comic book publishing house, failed to get a stall of their own.

"There seems to be a great deal of translated works this year," said Abir Hossain, 18, a private A-Level student. "But the ones I came across were the usual, well-known classics we see all the time. Translations of more recent, international books should be available at the fair."

"We should try to get popular writers, from in and out of Bangladesh, to attend the fair and talk about their craft. That way, I think, people would have something else to look forward to other than just buying books," said Absary Tasnim, a student of English, Govt. Bangla College. Bangla Academy did, for the first time this year, hold an international literary conference. About 48 litterateurs from 12 countries took part in it, and it lasted from the 1st of February till the 4th. It didn't get much attention from the masses though, as many didn't even know about it when I asked them.

Ridwan Mugdha, 19, opined, "More foreign books would have been nice. The

Boi Mela doesn't necessarily need to only house Bangla books, and I think a lot of people would benefit from the availability of those kinds of books."

When we asked our readers on Facebook for their opinions, several of them reiterated this point. Auhom Ahar Al Quazi, said that he'd like to see non-translated English books, especially those that are hard to come by. However, according to Article 6.1 of the Fair Regulations, the stalls aren't allowed to sell books published and printed outside Bangladesh, so there's that. Also, one publisher can't sell another publisher's books.

"I often fail to see original science-fiction. True, once in a while, there comes a very good book, but mostly it's the translations of genre books by Sheba that we have," said Sazzad Ridwan, 17, an HSC candidate.

Science fiction, it goes without saying, is very popular in Bangladesh, and this year there was a fair amount of new books

on the genre as well, but most of them do seem to have rehashed themes, and 'original' or maybe just well-written books on the subject *are* direly needed.

On the subject of science and science learning, Mehedi Hasan commented on our Facebook page that he would like to see more books on science that place an emphasis on diverse and easy-to-grasp content. Sheikh Rifayet Daiyan Srijon, also on our page, said that the Boi Mela is missing "A compilation of all the Olympiad books."

That being said, the fair's children's corner was a delight to browse through, and thanks to the incessant hartals and oborodhs, it wasn't too congested.

If you haven't visited yet, you should already.

Do head over to our Facebook page to leave your opinions.

Dhaka Comic's announcement regarding being denied a stall:  
<http://on.fb.me/1L2w4ba>

