



PHOTO: AVIPSU DAS GUPTA

First-timers at Ekushey Boi Mela

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

The overwhelming presence of literary enthusiasts at Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan, during the month of February, speaks volumes about the love for books in Bangladeshis' hearts. The Ekushey Boi Mela this year, on a regular day, was primarily crowded with young people sprawled across the venue boasting over 700 stalls, along with some families with children.

Moving from stall to stall was the order of the day for visitors, except perhaps to linger for a while at some personal favourite stores. With less than a week left before the country's largest book festival wraps up, we caught up

with a number of young first-time visitors at the Ekushey Boi Mela to find out about their experiences.

Mashiat Islam, a student of Academia School Dhaka, was unable to attend the fair earlier because she resided overseas for many years. She finally got the opportunity this time around. A fan of mysteries and fiction, Mashiat was impressed by Shamir Montazid's *Heisenberg er Golpo*. "There is a lot to learn from this book. It presents many complex scientific thoughts in an interesting way," she said.

Many readers were particularly drawn to books by Muhammed Zafar Iqbal. Be it *Niyan*, *Hotline* or *Mitu Titu's Time Machine*, it was evident that his books connect well with

the youth. "I developed a keen interest in science ever since I started studying the subject. In many ways, Zafar sir's books have aided in fostering my curiosity," said Ahnaf Alavi Rafi, a student of Dhaka Residential Model College.

Naimul Hasan Emon, a student of Bogura Cantonment Public School and College, also shared his thoughts on the author. "I have bought two of Zafar sir's books today and I cannot wait to go home and read them," he said. "His books keep readers hooked and tend to build a hunger for more knowledge."

Naimul, who came to Dhaka for the first time this year, always wanted to attend the Ekushey Boi Mela. A bookworm since childhood, he had only read about the fair in

newspapers and watched reports about it on television. Visiting the fair for the first time was a special experience for him. Naimul also picked up Ayman Sadiq's *Student Hacks* and *Bhalla Na*, both of which are inspirational reads for young people.

Even though science-fiction was a popular pick amongst young bookworms at the Ekushey Boi Mela, it was not the only genre that sparked their interest. We came across Mahira Farhin, a student of Siddiqui's International School, who was perusing *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. "I love the ambience of the fair. It is exciting to see so many people come together to share their love of reading," smiled Mahira, who returned to Bangladesh from the USA in

2017. "I would love to read more Bangla books once I am more fluent in the language."

Apart from new Bangla novels, young readers like Mahira were also on the lookout for good English books along with English translations of Bangla books. The patriotic spirit surrounding the Ekushey Boi Mela was infectious as people who came to pay their respects to the Language Movement martyrs at the Shaheed Minar also dropped by to buy books from the fair as they did not want to miss out on the festivities.

The Ekushey Boi Mela, an annual festivity anticipated by Bangladeshi book lovers, also saw a noteworthy attendance of foreign nationals at this year's iteration.

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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Commonwealth Regional Youth Conference on Peace and Security 2019

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Royal Commonwealth Society will host the Commonwealth Youth Dialogue Conference in Kuala Lumpur from April 1-4. The conference aims to build the capacity of emerging young leaders to bridge communities, lead action and prevent violent extremism through dialogue.

DEADLINE: February 25, 2019 | Conference

Journalism Now World Team Challenge 2019

Journalism Now Team Challenge gives a group of participants the chance to win an all-expenses-paid one week work-study trip to London, UK in autumn of 2019. Best regional performers will also be chosen and honoured, and prizes will be awarded for exceptional content.

DEADLINE: March 1, 2019 | Competition



Prime Minister Fellowship Bangladesh 2019

Governance Innovation Unit of the Prime Minister's Office announced 'Prime Minister Fellowship 2019' for Master's and PhD students of Bangladeshi nationality. Students who have an offer letter from any of the world's top 300 universities can apply.

DEADLINE: March 31, 2019 | Fellowship

Mayurpankhi: Nurturing children's reading habits



Mitia Osman, CEO of Mayurpankhi.

PHOTO: MONON MUNTAKA

JABIR MISBAH

Mayurpankhi is a Bangladeshi publishing house that specialises in children's books. With a target of becoming the largest book reading society in Bangladesh, they publish books boasting quality content and design, while making them available at affordable prices.

Mayurpankhi started in 2015 with a small team. Since then, they have gone on to publish over 75 books, with graphic works by acclaimed illustrators including, Sabyasachi Mistry and Chetan Sharma. Mayurpankhi has been under the limelight in the children's section for their work at the Ekushey Boi Mela since 2016. For their efforts, the organisation has won the Rokonuzzaman Khan Dadabhai Award from Bangla Academy in 2016.

The name, 'Mayurpankhi', given by an in-house writer of the team, symbolises the spread of education. The organisation employs writers from all over Dhaka. Many graduates and students from public universities work as freelancers with them. Since Mayurpankhi focuses primarily on drafting story books, illustration is their main dish. To that end, they have some of the best designers to ensure the highest production quality.

"When it comes to children, under-

standing the content and maintaining a standard quality are of utmost importance," explains Mitia Osman, the CEO of Mayurpankhi. "The influencers of the children's books' market are not just the children but also their parents, so it is essential to keep a close eye on their purchase behaviours." Mitia is a literary enthusiast who regularly attends book fairs in Frankfurt, London, Bologna and many other corners around the world to expand her knowledge in this field. Her work is inspired by her father, who owns a noted publishing house of his own. "My aim is to bring children back to the pages of story books and let them travel in the stories crafted by their imagination," says Mitia.

In addition to bringing out a rich collection of Bangla books, Mayurpankhi also does Bangla translations of popular literary works for children from not only English, but also Turkish, Indonesian, Italian and Portuguese. One of their most notable works in 2018 was Mitali Perkin's young adult novel, *Rickshaw Girl*.

Books published by Mayurpankhi can be bought from different bookstores in the city. Currently, Bengal Boi, Baatighar and the Public Library offer the biggest collection of their publications. They also have their own stall at the Ekushey Boi Mela, which is currently under way.