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Keynote

Ekushey Book Fair begins today

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The Amar Ekushey Book Fair 2008 begins today on Bangla Academy premises in the city, commemorating the historic Language Movement of February 1952.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed is expected to inaugurate the month-long festival at 3:30pm, academy Director General Syed Muhammad Shahed said.

"We hope the fair would be more organised, well-decorated and lively this year compared to those in the past with the participation of bookworms, writers, poets, publishing houses and all others concerned," Shahed said at a press conference at the academy yesterday.

He said the authorities have taken up a number of initiatives considering the visitors' convenience and introduced stringent rules for the participating publishing houses.

The venue of the country's largest book festival and outside will be decorated with banners,

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Ekushey Book Fair

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festoons and placards, upholding the spirit of Amar Ekushey. The entire venue is free from smoking and polythene.

The fair management committee led by Fazlur Rahim, director (institutional planning and training department) of the academy, has completed all preparations including allocating stalls and taking tight security measures to avert any untoward incident.

A total of 362 stalls consisting of up to maximum three units have been allocated to 236 institutions and publishing houses this year. A few stalls have been allotted to different socio-cultural, non-governmental and voluntary organisations.

The fair will remain open for all from 3:00pm to 9:00pm every day. On holidays, however, the fair will start at 11:00am and have a two-hour break from 12:00noon.

On February 21, the International Mother Language Day, the fair will start at 8:00am and continue up to 10:00pm without any break.

There will be two entrances to the fair with six archways, two each of which will be reserved for women and children. The middle gate of the academy leads the exit from the fair.

February 21 commemorates the Language Movement, protesting the then Pakistan government's decision to establish Urdu as the only state language of the country although Bangalees were majority.

Rafiq, Salam, Jabbar, Barkat, Shafiu and many unknown others sacrificed their lives on that day in 1952 as the law enforcers fired on processions demanding recognition of Bangla as one of the state languages.

In 1997, the UN declared February 21 as the International Mother Language Day.

Bangla Academy has been organising the book fair since 1984 and in 1984 it was named

Bangla Academy authorities have set up an information centre in the west corner of the Burdwan House, the historic building where the chief minister of the then East Pakistan would reside. Bangla Academy was first established in this building. It was also the place where recognition of Bangla as a state language was earlier opposed.

The authorities will declare the Ekushey Padak this month. This year the award will be given in three categories instead of six given in the previous years.

On the occasion of the fair, host Bangla Academy has already published 40 books and will bring 15 more books, including a biography of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a dictionary of Bangla spelling, a compilation of Dhan-Shaliker Desh, the academy's magazine for children, and a number of textbooks.

The budget of the fair this year is Tk 25,35,000. Brac Bank is assisting Bangla Academy in organising the fair, which will help the academy save Tk 15 lakh.

Two banks will set up temporary branches and an ATM booth on the fair premises.

The authorities will arrange a number of competitions, including painting, for children.

A seminar styled "Bangladesh's achievement in art and literature in three decades" will be held on the central stage beside the Burdwan House every day until February 19. There will also be cultural programmes.

On February 21, Prof Mustafa Nurul Islam will deliver the Amar Ekushey Speech.