

# All publishers to join book fair

Inauguration on Feb 26

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The Amar Ekushey Book Fair will be held with the participation of all publishers, following a decision taken on Sunday night and officially announced yesterday.

However, the fair will now begin on February 26 instead of February 25 and will continue until March 15, making it a 19-day event -- the shortest in the fair's history.



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Until Sunday evening, Prokashok Oikya, a joint platform representing major publishers in the country, had announced a boycott. More than 300 publishing houses had withdrawn from the fair, citing objections to holding it during Ramadan.

Following intervention by the new government, a meeting on Sunday evening led to their decision to participate. It was also decided that stalls would be allocated free of cost and that no pavilions would be allowed except for those of the organising body, Bangla Academy.

After these decisions, the lottery for stall allocation was held on Sunday night.

Bangla Academy has announced that Prime Minister Tarique Rahman will inaugurate the fair at 2:00pm on February 26. This will mark his first major public event since assuming office.

Traditionally, Bangla Academy organises the Amar Ekushey Book Fair from February 1 every year. However, due to security concerns surrounding the February 12 parliamentary election, the academy had initially decided to advance the fair to December.

That move faced opposition from a section of publishers, as well as more than 30 social and cultural organisations, who demanded that the fair be held in the language month in keeping with tradition.

As a result, authorities withdrew the December plan. After the election and formation of the government, February 20 was set as the new start date.

However, with Ramadan already underway by then, a large section of publishers urged that the fair be postponed until after Eid-ul-Fitr, citing fears of low attendance and financial risks.

Bangla Academy remained firm on its decision. The fair was later deferred by five days to February 25 before the final decision was made on Sunday to begin on February 26.

Yesterday morning, Prokashok Oikya held a press conference at Jatiya Press Club, announcing its reversal of the boycott.

MahruKh Mohiuddin, managing director of UPL, said, “Publishers initially wanted the fair to be held after Eid, considering practical realities, but the interim government did not respond. After the new government took office, the cultural affairs minister and state minister held discussions with publishers. The publishers presented three conditions, and the government assured their fulfillment. Subsequently, more than 200 publishers submitted applications on the 19th of this month.”

“In the interest of equal rights for all publishers, Prokashok Oikya decided not to take any pavilion and demanded that no one else be given one either. When we saw that pavilions were not being dismantled and our conditions were not being met, we announced our withdrawal. However, following a sincere understanding reached on Sunday night among the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangla Academy, and the Bangladesh Publishers and Booksellers Association (BAPUS), the government agreed to our conditions. Therefore, Prokashok Oikya is now participating in the fair,” she added.

Selim Reza, member secretary of the Book Fair Management Committee, told The Daily Star, “We are happy that all publishers are participating in this year’s fair. We hope it will be held in a festive atmosphere with everyone’s involvement.”

He also said more than 500 publishing houses are participating in this year’s fair.

