

## Students to get textbooks by Jan 21: NCTB

Despite having been no major progress in printing textbooks with new academic session beginning Monday, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board continued tall talk that students would get the books within this month, reports UNB.

"We are optimistic that the primary schoolchildren will get books within next week while the secondary students in-between January 15 and 21," Tapan Kanti Chowdhury, Chairman of the NCTB, told UNB Monday.

Elaborating how hard he and his officials are working day and night, he said the latest date can be end of this month, not after that. But many printers involved in printing book yesteryears scuttled the optimism.

"The so-called printing presses

of Beximco, who got the order, even didn't procure papers for a lion's share of the books. How they will complete printing all the books?" questioned a publisher, who didn't want to be named.

In a critical observation the publisher-cum-printer said Beximco presses had the capacity of printing three lakh books, but they got the order for three crores. Some others seconded him that the entire order was made in the interest of certain people.

The printers and publishers, not involved in printing books this year as their top leader was arrested for a textbook scandal during caretaker government in 1996, asked what action would be taken against those now involved in the 'bookgate' scandal.

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## Textbooks

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They said it would be one month behind the normal practice if even the books were reached by end of January. "We want to see what action the government takes for the delayed delivery," said the printers-publishers.

"Definitely... Punitive action will be taken against the concerned firms. But now we are busy reaching the books to the students. We will go for action after the books reach the students," said the NCTB boss, Tapan Chowdhury.

When asked what kind of action could be taken for the failure, he said the printing presses who got the order of printing books would be penalised when their payments will be given. But now their main headache is delivery of the books.

The head of the scandalous NCTB, also dubbed by many printers and publishers as the corruption house, said the books would reach the districts adjoining Dhaka earlier. For distant districts it will take some time.

But the printers smelt differences in the chairman's statements made at different times about reaching books. Though completion of printing is far away, they

said, the NCTB plans to reach the books first to the districts of ministers and stalwarts.

Quoting NCTB, Saleh Matin, Director General of the Directorate of Primary Education, however, told UNB that the primary school books, which are distributed free of cost, had already started reaching different districts.

From the districts the books will go to the upazilas. But, sources said, it would take time as the books are sent to the upazilas when books of all the five classes reach the districts. Books of one

or two classes are not sent for part delivery.

Although the academic year began already, Saleh Matin, once again quoting NCTB, said they didn't apprehend that the students will not get their books in time. He, however, said the date of formal launch is yet to be decided. "It'll be shortly."

Concerned people said the major debacle in printing school textbooks and reaching those to the students took place following "nepotism" on the part of authorities concerned. The NCTB made the major order for three presses of the Beximco.

The three printing presses got order of 4.07 crore books for primary level while 2.51 crore pieces for secondary level. Order of 1.55 crore pieces of books for primary schools went to 105 printing presses in Dhaka.

A total of Tk 78 crore is involved in printing books for classes 6-10. All the secondary books are almost new ones as the NCTB went for massive correction and changes in syllabus. For primary level cost of printing books is Tk 14 crore.

As the printing presses of the Beximco failed repeatedly in meeting time, a fresh order for printing 1.45 crore pieces of books was made again to 105 presses, which are busy printing their original order.

However, many printers who worked in the previous years but didn't get any order this time said it is not clear whether the latest order was made from the share of the three Beximco presses or it is a fresh one.