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Readying Text Books In Time

Last year's scandal surrounding the printing of school text-books seems to have awakened the authorities concerned to the immense challenge before them prior to the beginning of the next academic year. However, the step they have taken for timely printing and distribution of text books is yet to be tested. Let us hope the measure does not end in another aborted experimentation.

Apparently the preparation looks good. This time the tender system is going to be abolished and instead as many as 15 committees will be responsible for primary selection of printing presses. They will submit their lists to a high-powered committee for finalisation of the organisations. These organisations will be given the responsibility of printing text books for students at the secondary level for the next academic year. The Text-book Board has also made an arrangement for ensuring quality paper for printing books.

So far so good. However there is one crucial point that can throw the whole process in jeopardy. It is the education ministry which has retained, according to a report, the right to fix the price rate of the books to be printed. In the past we saw how the listed printing presses raised the rate through arm-twisting. This time may be no difference. This is end of September. Barely three months are left for the job. We can well expect a round or two of psychological war over the fixation of prices for text books. The more the process is dragged, the better for the listed organisations to extract a favourable deal. If they collectively take a stand, it will not be easy for the ministry, the National Curriculum and the Text-book Board to stand their ground.

As for the printing of text books for primary schools, some changes have also been brought about. The entire lot of books has been divided into 150 packages for allocation through tender. This way it has reportedly been possible to reduce the cost of printing by 20 to 25 per cent. A good move, no doubt. The question is if the maintenance of quality of papers will be followed here as well. Let there be no let-up in completing the job well and in time.