

Books and academies

There has been a lot of concern expressed on the diminishing publishing industry in the country. The fears are genuine because the actual number of books published this year is less than that of last year and the trend is indicative of a decline. Certainly, there has never been a boom in book publishing in this country, but whatever level was achieved is now rapidly going down. Private publishers usually go by a keen business sense and they would not venture into any enterprise which does not promise a reasonable profit. The costs of paper, printing ink and other publishing materials have gone up over the years and therefore the industry complains that books need to be priced now at levels higher than the purchasing capacities of many readers.

But to stay in business, the industry has moved into cheap and yellow literature leaving aside the serious literary and other works. Many have already voiced their apprehensions about the cumulative effect of such an intellectual bankruptcy in the field of publishing books. But to change the trend among most private publishing houses would take a lot of time because after all these are run on the principles of free enterprise. It is basically the task of the state owned publishing concerns attached to such institutions as the Bangla Academy, Shishu Academy and Shilpakala Academy which must pick up the gauntlet and be the trend setters. The question is whether these institutions which are run with state funds are fulfilling such a task.

Apparently not, otherwise they could have cushioned at least a part of the crisis in the book publishing industry. Many prominent writers have complained against the Bangla Academy and the Shishu Academy that their manuscripts after having been chosen through an elaborate and bureaucratic process were left on the shelves of the printing shops till most of these became out of mode with the modern literary trend. Also, these institutions remain virtually closed to fresh entrants although one of their basic purposes is to encourage new talents throughout the country. In an earlier editorial on Feb. 9, the Times had underlined how these institutions become the victims of interest groups some belonging to their own staff.

A sample survey will reveal that in recent years these academies have published more books of their own staff members than others outside these institutions. If this trend continues, the main purpose of the academies to encourage good writing in Bangla will be endangered.