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## School text books

The distribution of books among our school goers has never been a smooth affair despite our having all the time in the world between the end of one academic year and the beginning of another.

The Bangladesh School Text Book Board brought out text books for students from class one to five and scheduled their free distribution by January. Publication of text books for students of classes between six and nine was assigned by the Board to selected private publishers. The latter were to sell the books and pay an eight per cent royalty to the Board.

The distribution of books meant free for the primary level students is being impeded in this second month of the new year by some abnormal factors. The guardians are pushed into another phase of uncertainty on the heels of the one they had while getting their wards admitted into a school.

Reports specially from the countryside speak of a certain grudge being shown by some school teachers and local educational officials that the books must be given free among so many students. They are said to be ganging up and applying novel ideas to fleece the parents. One report alleges that a headmaster of a school collaborated with a high ranking official of the education department and obtained a quota of books in excess of the number of students he has. He then sold the surplus to a bookstore. But that is not the only way they farmed out money. The books left for the students were reportedly distributed at a price to them, exacted as subscriptions, against which, they had the audacity to issue receipts also. In another incident, a first class magistrate of Sonargaon upazila raided a godown and recovered seven thousand 195 sets of books outside the list maintained by the local education officer. Obviously such books were kept for black marketing.

Needless to say, we cannot afford any bungling to go on with the free distribution of books, which is linked to a high principle of making primary education compulsory and universal in the country.

Books for students from class six to nine, printed and marketed by the publishers in the private sector, has also become illusory to the school goers. Barring the text books for class IX which were reprints and therefore readily available, those of classes six to eight are in no steady supply. Similarly, the arithmetic books for classes six and seven which had to be revised are still unavailable.

Although books of higher classes are brought out by the publishers, the Bangladesh School Text Book Board determines the quality and prices of these. The authority supplies manuscripts to the printers and holds them to a timetable for publishing and selling the books. The Board therefore has natural levers against the publishers in case they went wrong. But if it itself initiated the process belatedly the results could not be anything but a mess in the end. The authorities concerned must make sure to have the books ready latest by November to advance the distribution schedule. Otherwise we would be facing the same ordeal year after year.