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## The text book episode

The current series of school text books have surpassed the previous ones not in excellence but in deficiency. Recent newspaper reports putting quite a few books in the dock for the factual mistakes, grammatical errors, conceptual flaws and printing lapses they contain, the National Curriculum and Text Book Board has been jarred into admitting these with the result that it has formed an experts' committee to set the books in order.

With almost a quarter of the academic year now over, either the books already in use have to be withdrawn wholesale to be replaced by the corrected versions or that master copies would need to be sent to the schools for carrying out alterations in the books possessed by the students. These two alternatives will be considered only after all the necessary corrections have been made in the reading materials. These tasks which are now falling on the shoulders of the experts and presenting the unsavoury prospect of a mid-year academic dislocation could be substantially avoided had the men appointed to vet the books prior to their printing and release done their job well enough. The Board has taken pains to explain the elaborate process it had undertaken to ensure that the books were correct in all respects. The pertinent question is: how could the mistakes creep in despite the existence of such a vetting system? If the book specialists had failed, the ultimate blame would be for the board to take, there cannot be any lightening of the burden of responsibility, from whatever angle we looked at the issue.

It is also noticeable that books change rather frequently as a result of amendments made to the syllabi from time to time. These involve an extensive re-writing of texts and going through the processes of vetting and printing all over again, attended by the possibility of mistakes creeping in. This overall trend needs to be halted. We should determine the text book syllabi firmly and let these continue undisturbed for at least five to six years. Books would be written accordingly for a durable circulation and use with time in hand to pre-empt mistakes and inaccuracies.

We understand that the text book authority has a panel of writers for each subject who author the various books. In the past it was entirely the publisher's job to find out a good writer to produce a certain book in competition with other publishers. The whole exercise used to be competitive so that the best came out of it. What we are driving at is, the necessity of ensuring that there is something to match that competition in book production.