

About School Text-books

The government programme of printing and distribution of text-books for primary and secondary schools is once again in a shambles. Once again the blame is being shifted to each other's door. Already the last date for completion of printing those books for the new academic year has elapsed and yet, surprisingly, the text-book board authority claims books will be available on time. The distribution of books were supposed to start on January 3. As an eye-wash some books in some schools will be distributed but what about those books yet to be printed? Even the books printed by now will take quite sometime to reach the schools all across the country.

It is not difficult to understand why the same thing happens year after year. Involved in this matter is big money. So the printing contractors find the deal lucrative and a section of the board employees deliberately delay the process in their own interests. This is what emerges as the sum and substance from reports carried in different dailies at different times. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain how the group of printing contractors, despite its low bid, had to face uncertainty before the education ministry intervened in its favour. By the time its proposal was accepted and it was given the working order, precious two months had elapsed.

It seems nobody in the text-book board learns from the past. Again, there is the allegation that the presses that got the working order were not supplied printing papers in time. On the other hand, the board alleged that the contractors accepted orders for printing books beyond their capacity. This point needs to be clarified. We do not say that they did not do so. But they have by this time printed 80-85 per cent of the total books amounting to five crores. A two-month's delay can make a lot of difference in the situation. Had there been no press reports on this matter, is there any guarantee that the lower bidder of the two press groups would get the work order? Why the education minister himself had to intervene?

And all this after past several years' similar experiences! The vested interest group in the text-book board could not care less. They hold people's intelligence in contempt. In fact, the board authority is there to ensure that the publishing houses have the ability to accomplish the job at a competitive price, well in time and according to the specification. Instead, manipulation at this end is noticeable and this in fact sets the tone of the whole exercise. No wonder, the books that leave the press are of a low quality and kids find them unattractive. The end result is that many young learners have to purchase two or more sets of books as they do not survive the rough treatment at the hands of those children.

As for the three new books of the secondary level, the working order was given on December 10 but the positive film of the books were handed over to the printers as late as December 24. If this is the style of decision-making at the board level, the printing presses cannot get the job done on time even if they possess Aladin's magic lamp. It is time that an investigation were carried into the working of the text-book board to see what went wrong and where. Every year the students cannot suffer for a few salaried people's inefficiency, greed or deliberate machination. The year 1998 should be the last year when such a text-book scandal hit the newspaper headlines.