

The Daily Star

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Text Book Crisis

MORE than one month into the new academic year, the national curriculum and textbook board is yet to ensure availability of new editions of certain books for the secondary students; that, too, even after rescheduling the deadline from January 1 to 31. Naturally, the students and their parents are in a dilemma as to whether to wait for the new editions or buy the old ones. As if this was not poignant enough an indicator of its incompetence, some publishers have even brought out old editions with new covers, heightening the confusion all the more. Basically, therefore, the board has failed on two counts: first, for twice turning back on its commitment to revise the selected eight textbooks in time; and second, for not being prudent enough to come up with a clarification of sorts, inclusive of a few lines on the cover-page conundrum, to dispel the widespread confusion. We wonder when it would wake up to the fact that a slippage at its end essentially means disturbance in the academic activities at different public schools and inconvenience for the teachers and the students, let alone worries for the guardians.

The prevailing situation speaks of ill planning and poor execution. There may be some systemic inadequacy in the board that forces such slip-ups. It could be that the organisation was not equipped with proper logistics and manpower to carry out the revision of text books in time for publication. Also, there appears to be a lack of control over the publishers who were given work orders to print the books. Publication of one crore and 20 lakh books is no child's play; it required a high level of co-ordination within the board and co-ordination between the board and the printing houses. Besides, the responsibility of the monitoring mechanism, if there is one, is immense as regards making sure the printers are going by the instructions set forth by the board. On the whole, the current scenario speaks of the dire need to have a re-assessment of the board's efficacy. There may be quite a few loopholes in the whole arrangement that need to be plugged.

Whatever might have been the reason for the unavailability of the textbooks in the market at this stage we would request the board to redress the situation as soon as possible, articulate and circulate a clarification on matters related to revision of the texts, new cover pages, etc. In the long term, it should diagnose the systemic failures and remedy them. Similar slip-ups should by no means recur.