

Textbook Scam

For years together students of primary and secondary schools of the country have been forced to begin their academic year without books. Each year around this time complaints get vociferous about the non-availability of textbooks. Those responsible for the job seem to have made it a habit not to take note of the crisis. Why? Is it because the textbooks at the primary level are distributed free or printing and publishing of those at the secondary level get delayed as there is money to be made? Involved here are crores of taka and unless personal or coterie interests get over the national well-being, such things cannot continue for long.

That it does has become more than clear this time. How come that a publishing house with no proven track record for such a stupendous job was given the responsibility for printing crores of books? Even the publishing house is alleged to have claimed what it in reality is not. Companies not caring so much for their reputation are likely to go for shady deals but what about the National Curriculum and Text Book Board? Its job is precisely to ensure that the students get their books at the start of the new academic year. Instead reports have it that the NCTB has made a fresh deal in favour of the defaulting printing concerns for them to pay royalty "in six instalments in violation of the terms and conditions of the tender."

In this connection the directive from the Prime Minister's office for taking legal action against the defaulting printers and distributors has come to nothing. When newspapers are making screaming headlines about the text book crisis and the scandalous stories concerning it, the Education Minister surprisingly claimed contrarily before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education. This is quite intriguing. What has prompted the Education Minister to make such an outlandish claim—one that even the printers and distributors have not thought of doing, should be brought to the public knowledge. The Education Minister would do well to explain his position in this regard.

As for the delay in printing books, this year should be the last time. This is no way of giving a start to the young learners' academic year much less educating them. It is a shame that concerns expressed repeatedly could not bring about the desired change till now in such a vital area of education. After all this is no big ask.