

Time, once again, to take textbook printing seriously

FEARS that the publication, hence the timely distribution, of 7.41 crore out of the 14.82 crore secondary textbooks needed for the 2016 academic year could be delayed, as New Age reported on Tuesday, calls for an immediate government intervention. The situation has come about as one of the two paper mills that won the bidding for the supply of 5,000 tonnes of paper did not sign the contract with the National Textbook and Curriculum Board until June 24, when it was supposed to complete the formalities to get the work order. While the other paper mill that won the bidding to get the board 9,500 tonnes of paper for the printing of the textbooks started a delayed supply and is expected to meet the deadline, the textbook board looks well set to fail to provide all of the 1.12 crore secondary students on January 1, when the school academic year begins, which has been customary for the past five years and is considered by many to be a success of the government of the day.

While the paper mill that won the bidding for the supply of 5,000 tonnes of paper for the printing of the book did not sign the contract with the textbook board, it did not give any reason for its inability at signing the contract. The textbook board, in a punitive measure, has confiscated Tk 1 crore, kept in security deposit, of the paper mill, the fact remains that the situation would warrant that the board puts the paper supply out to tender afresh. The bidding process in the question that failed for at least one of the paper mills took three months to complete, from January to March. The textbook board is, thus, likely to need three more months to complete a fresh tender process, until October, and the bid winner will need two more months to complete the paper supply job. This will, in turn, hold back the board from beginning to print the textbooks, at least, until December, making a complete distribution of the secondary textbooks almost impossible on January 1.

The textbook board, as the New Age report said, has initiated the fresh process of putting the paper supply job out to tender and the board says that it will have been able to meet the textbook distribution deadline, chances are still there that the board might fail to distribute the books even with a reasonable delay unless there is continuous oversight. In the circumstances, we urge the government to take up the issue seriously and continuously monitor the whole process, from tender to printing to distribution, so that students, even if all of them do not get all their textbooks just on January 1, get the books in a day or two after the academic year begins. The government is also well advised to take into account such unwarranted problems when it plans to print textbooks in future.