

PUBLIC EXAM QUESTIONS LEAK

Govt staff involved: TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of government officials responsible for preparing, printing and distributing public exam question papers are involved in their leakage, a TIB study has found.

The leaked questions are then spread by some leaders of the ruling party's student wing, coaching centres, guidebook traders, people in photocopy shops, guardians, students and their relatives, according to the study.

Findings show all this is possible because between preparation and distribution there are too many steps -- 40 in all with 19 of them risky.

Leaked questions are sold for between Tk 20 and 20,000, the graft watchdog said yesterday, releasing the report at a press conference at its Dhanmondi office in the capital.

The study -- Question leak in public examinations: Process, reasons and way out -- was done between January and July this year.

- 63 papers leaked in four years since 2012
- Students can buy questions for Tk 20 to 20,000
- Policymakers' denial encourages leak
- Too many stages involving too many people in question preparation
- Lack of coordination and monitoring in the process



"Education is one of the sectors for which Bangladesh has been praised worldwide ... but we are worried about the quality of education."

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TIB
AT A PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY

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In the four years since 2012, as many as 63 question papers of primary terminal, JSC, SSC and HSC exams were leaked. Of those, questions of all papers of primary terminal and junior school certificate exams held in last year and the previous year were leaked, it says.

"Education is one of the sectors for which Bangladesh has been praised worldwide ... but we are worried about the quality of education," Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, told reporters.

He said question paper leak was a major problem in education.

According to the report, National Academy for Primary Education, Directorate of Primary Education, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, BG Press and district and upazila administrations are the government bodies whose officials are involved in the leak.

"Questions can be leaked at different stages and in different ways. No single institution can be blamed [for this]," said Rumana Sharmin, deputy programme manager (research and policy) at the TIB, while presenting the findings.

It is quite impossible to leak question papers unless some government employees at any of the three stages -- preparation, printing and distribution -- are involved.

The report says though the government has taken several deterrent measures, question papers continue to be leaked for a variety of reasons. Top among them are policymakers' denial of the leak, lack of any instance of punishment, long and manual process in the preparation and distribution and inadequate monitoring.

Questions can be leaked during preparation or moderation. The same moderator remains in the post for years and this is very risky as he can give suggestions to his own school or coaching centres from his experience, the TIB said.

Besides, there is no specific guideline for appointing question paper formulators and moderators.

The risk of leak is high during com-

pose, proof reading, counting, packaging and even after sending the question papers to the boards.

Also, questions can be leaked on the morning of the exam. Some teachers open the sealed envelope containing the questions, take snaps of the questions with their mobile phones and send those to students through text message, email and Facebook, the study found.

"Coaching centres play the leading role in the leak and distribution," it said.

"We are witnessing students growing up in a culture without ethics," said Nihar Ranjan Roy, deputy programme manager (research and policy) at the TIB.

When bought individually, a question paper costs between Tk 20 and 10,000, depending on the time and the place it is bought from. The amount is between Tk 10,000 and 20,000 when it is bought in a group.

"From what we have found, we think it is a growth industry. But we could not determine the actual size of the business," said Iftekharuzzaman, adding that Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid put the business size at Tk 32,000 crore.

"An informal syndicate of a section of government and private stakeholders are involved in the leak," said the TIB executive director.

To check it, strict enforcement of the law is imperative, including bringing the culprits to book, he said.

Replying to a question, Iftekharuzzaman said the tendency of denial of policymakers and ministers contributed to repeated leaks. "We will never be able to solve any problem if we act like an ostrich."

The TIB made seven recommendations, including reinstating the 10-year jail sentence in the Public Examinations (Offences) (Amendment) Act-1992 instead of the current four-year sentence, digitising the entire process from question formulation to distribution, reducing the number of steps involved in the process, publishing the probe report on question leak and withdrawing the MCQ system gradually.