

NCTB has failed to publish books in time : audit report

Although crisis in printing, publishing and distribution of textbooks creates nagging problems for millions of students every year, government authorities failed to remove irregularities embedded in the entire process, reports UNB.

This was revealed in a performance audit report on National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) for the period 1995-2001.

Government's audit department placed the report in the recently prorogued autumn session of Parliament to apprise the lawmakers of the situation concerning textbooks that are so important for the country's education system.

The report categorically says the NCTB "always failed to print and publish textbooks in time for delayed printing order and supply of positives, lack of monitoring, deadlines for tender and printing activities, and awarding work order to firms that do not have adequate printing capacity".

It suggested fixation of time-limit for invitation of tenders, finalising, scrutiny, selection of bidders, issuance of letters of intent, signing agreements and giving work order, and fixing a set of principles for selecting qualified and capable printing institutions.

To ensure proper distribution, the Education Ministry, which is responsible for some of the problems, should closely monitor the NCTB activities for timely supply and receipt of primary and secondary textbooks as the Board has no effective monitoring system of its own, the report said.

The audit report suggested the formation of a permanent monitoring cell in the Board for intensive supervision of the entire book-publishing process in order to avert recurring hassles.

A close scrutiny by the auditors found quality of paper and printing and binding of textbooks for 2001 academic year "very poor". But, says the audit observations, the NCTB did not lodge any complaint or take action against those at fault.

According to press reports, such wrongdoing cost the government Tk 20 crore.

In 1998-1999, excess "due parts" were published for the secondary level which remained unsold in the NCTB godown and the prospect of their sale is very slim as the curricula have already been changed, according to the audit report.

It also revealed unplanned changes in syllabus in different periods, often at short notice, had delayed printing and created printing-related problems.

There was also lack of proper

tender management and of fixed dates for tender invitation, and the erratic process contributed to the delays entailing additional costs.

The auditors observed that there is no government policy for distribution of textbooks to the students of the kindergarten schools. These schools have no other alternative but to buy books from open market for free distribution.

What is more worrying is that the survey by the audit department detected "fake textbooks" in the market as the NCTB failed to establish its control over the book affairs.

As a result, NCTB had taken initiative to publish books commensurate with market demand, but the supply of textbooks to the market became higher resulting in a mismatch.

The government audit department in its report suggested supply of new textbooks instead of old books for the tiny learners, which would cost the government Tk 18 crore.