

## Leakages in the distribution of school textbooks

*Strengthen monitoring mechanism to identify loopholes and punish offenders*

**R**EPORTS have it that illegal trade in primary and secondary school textbooks, meant for free distribution among the students in the districts and upazilas, is going on in the different book markets of the city. Such sales by some quarters in the market in collusion with a section of dishonest education officials in the districts have put a clear challenge before the government's stated policy of zero-tolerance against any irregularities in the distribution of the textbooks by the end of this month.

This is a serious matter to reckon with as it even flies in the face of the strict stand taken by the education minister against a district education official defaulting on implementing the government's declared objective.

The three-member high-powered committee formed to identify any instances of irregularity and corruption in the distribution of textbooks and ensure their supply by January 31, is already facing the deadline. It appears, the reported irregularities point only to the fact that the mechanism to monitor the distribution of the textbooks has not been able to detect the loopholes through which books are finding their way into the black market. To all appearances, some quarters are bent on frustrating the government's commendable effort at fulfilling the declared mission.

The developments call for making the monitoring mechanism stronger and foolproof. In fact, however strict and determined the minister concerned and the monitoring team may appear to be, the desired delivery of the goods depend on successful identification of the sources of the irregularities through which the books are leaking into the market. As the chairman of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is learnt to have pointed out, hoarding of primary school textbooks in the district offices is behind the availability of illegal books in the market. It is not hard to understand that irresponsible elements in the district education office are behind holding back the distribution of the books in due time. It is, therefore, the task of the monitoring team to identify them and bring the offenders to book. In a similar vein, it will also be necessary to identify and penalise the printers, publishers and binders, if any, who might be illegally printing copies of the textbooks in the market.

The government, the education minister to be specific, deserves kudos for this huge undertaking of supplying some 190 million textbooks to the school students. Thankfully, the target has been met, excepting some irregularities delaying the work at certain places. But under any circumstances, the task has to be completed. So, it will be expected of the authorities that they would be all out to complete the task within the deadline.