

Free grammar books next yr

WASIM BIN HABIB

Apart from distributing free textbooks to primary and secondary level students, the government will give out two supplementary books for free to the students of class VI to IX from next year, officials have said.

The students will no longer have to buy English Grammar & Composition and Bangla Byakaron (Bengali grammar), which they read as English and Bangla second papers.

"We think distribution of the grammar books will come to the aid of rural students, who cannot afford purchase of these books", Prof Mostofa Kamal Uddin, chairman of The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), told The Daily Star.

"We wanted to distribute these books for free this year but could not do due to some problems".

For free distribution, the NCTB will have to print around 1.50 crore copies of these two grammar books, and it has already initiated the work to this end, the board officials said.

They said the printing of these two books would cost Tk 35 to 40 crore. The expenses will come from the fund the government has allocated for printing and distributing of around 27 crore copies of textbooks for primary to secondary level students, they added.

The textbook board, however, will not distribute another supplementary book, Rapid Reader, for free, which is mainly referred to at renowned institutions in the capital.

The NCTB officials believe that free distribution of these books will also put a stop to the illegal business of some unscrupulous printers, who sell unapproved books by taking the advantage of laxness in monitoring.

Every year the NCTB prepares a list of supplementary books written by different authors. An expert committee, Independent Technical Evaluation Committee (ITEC), and its three evaluation committees then examine and scrutinise the contents of the books.

If ITEC gives the go-ahead, the board approves the books and fixes their prices for sale.

Despite the government's prohibition on the unapproved books, unscrupulous publishers coax the school authorities and their governing bodies into buying those books by offering them money. It happens every year, as the government lacks a proper monitoring mechanism.

In 2010, the government banned unapproved 25 supplementary books on grounds that they had been substandard and had distorted history. It has approved 23 supplementary books on the three subjects for the current academic session.

"Even though the government approved 23 books this year, at least hundreds of substandard grammar books are available in the market", said a high official of NCTB, preferring anonymity. These supplementary books will no longer be of use, once the government start distributing the books at free of cost, he said.