

Govt must have ways not to repeat textbook mess

POOR QUALITY paper stock, low-grade ink and shoddy glue binding that were used to print primary school textbooks, distributed in January this year, have made most of the books unusable well into six months the students started using them. In addition, poor printing quality has also marred the joy of students in having textbooks fresh off the printing presses. The damage came to notice just a week after the distribution of the textbooks when pages loosened off and the binding broke down, as the media then reported. The rot only ran its course for a few more months, now making all the books almost unusable as the text faded, pages frayed and the contrast, which is brightness of the text in contrast with the whiteness of the paper and came out poorly on the pages because of the use of dull paper stock and poor ink, reduced, coming to strain the eyes. Such a situation is disconcerting as the students still have to be using the books for three more months. Parents and teachers said, as New Age reported on Sunday, that the quality of the books this year was the worst in some recent years. Most of the students had their books freshly stitched, but the damage could not be headed off.

The situation has now forced many to either buy new sets of books, sold illegally on the market, or have the books photocopied for use for the remaining months. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board, however, discounted any possibility for replacing the broken textbooks but advised school authorities to get fresh books if they are available with the education administration in upazilas and districts. Such a proposition is ludicrous and highly improbable as the textbooks are printed based on an estimated count of students and not all of the affected students could have fresh sets of books. The textbook board, which has already put all the primary students in trouble by not adhering to the standards as required for textbook printing, has only to put in more efforts so that the situation does not repeat in the future. The board in May this year penalised 18 of the printers for supplying low-quality textbooks. But then again, the board has always been taking such punitive action against the errant printers and that has not changed the situation for the better. The textbook board is reported to have given the print job to the same printers who routinely come clean by paying some amount of fine for their wrongdoings every year. If the government means business, it has to do away with this practice.

The textbook board, or the government for that matter, must force the printers to comply with standards set in a manner so that the textbooks could be used for the full academic year. The government, to this end, has to stop giving print jobs to the printers who fail to keep to the standards and are thus penalised for the wrongdoings the year before.