

Textbooks printed on poor quality papers

Press owners sell NCTB-supplied quality paper in market, use lowly ones

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Printing press owners continue to print the primary and secondary level textbooks using low quality paper instead of 'security paper' and Karnaphuli white print paper provided by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

The unscrupulous printers allegedly sell the paper supplied by NCTB and use the cheaper Indian paper for printing the textbooks, but the authorities are yet to take any effective steps against them.

Admitting the malpractice, NCTB Chairman Prof Yusuf Farooq said, "We have received these allegations against the printing press owners and issued show cause notice against several of them but they seemingly don't care

it. What more can we do than issuing the notice?"

Bangladesh Printing Industries Association (BPIA) President Rabbani Jabbar, however, said they always print textbooks with the paper provided by the NCTB.

"We are not responsible for the textbooks with low quality paper that are in the market. Some fake printers who are not awarded the tender, market these textbooks with low quality paper in the absence of inspection by NCTB," he said.

Against the backdrop of increase of the paper price in international market, the government has continued to give an annual subsidy of Tk 5 crore since 2002 to enable the students of primary and secondary levels to purchase quality paper textbooks with low cost.

But the students had to buy low quality paper textbooks for last five years as an unscrupulous group led by present leaders of BPIA print the textbooks with low quality Indian paper instead of the paper provided by the NCTB and cheat a huge amount of money every year.

With the blessings of immediate past BNP government, especially former state minister for education Ehsanul Haq Milon and former education secretary Shahidul Alam, the 32-member executive committee of BPIA virtually took control over all textbook printing related tenders under the NCTB since 2001.

The committee's domination continues even during the present caretaker government, NCTB officials said.

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"These unscrupulous businessmen sell the 'security paper' and Karnaphuli white print paper for high prices and use the Indian low quality paper for the textbooks," said Abu Taher, president of Bangladesh Publishers and Booksellers Association.

A huge amount of low quality Indian paper is still stored in different printing presses, said a former leader of the printing industry association.

The prices of security paper and Karnaphuli white paper are Tk 800 and Tk 700 per rim while Indian low quality paper costs only Tk 500 per rim. The real security paper does not lose its original colour when it is torn but the false security paper shows white colour inside if it is torn.

Annually around 9.5 crore textbooks are printed for the primary level and around 2.5 crore books for the secondary level, NCTB sources said.

But, around ten crore textbooks for primary level and around three crore textbooks for secondary level are needed, leaders of BPIA said.

In the absence of proper statistics of NCTB, the unscrupulous group printed much higher number of books against the quantity allocated in the tender and supplied the additional books to the market before official publication of the NCTB books. The malpractice has continued for years.

Inside the cover pages of children's textbooks, four harder

sheets of paper are conventionally used, which is meant for protection of the content pages.

But the harder sheets, called 'end paper', have not been used since 2002 while the printing press owners backed by the BPIA's present committee embezzled around Tk 3.5 crore annually by showing the cost for that.

It is almost impossible to get work order without negotiating with the BPIA's present committee and the syndicate allegedly compels a printing press owner to pay Tk 14,000 for getting the job, several printing press owners said.

The press owners concerned are too hesitant to protest as they do not want to take the risk of losing the tender.

The syndicate also persuaded the NCTB to introduce a new rule in 2002 where a printer has to deposit 75 per cent as earnest money whereas a printing press owner deposited only 10 per cent before 2002 for getting a work order.

"Most of the printing press owners do not have the capacity to pay 75 per cent earnest money and they have to seek help from BPIA for getting work order for printing. But the present committee have been taking Tk 14,000 from each printing press owner in the name of guarantee for the earnest money. But the huge amount of money is not deposited to the BPIA fund," said a press owner.

The BNP-backed present BPIA committee also cancelled mem-

bership of many honest printing press owners and entered the names of many fake members to maintain their control over BPIA.

"In 2001, the number of BPIA members was 1147 but now there are only 437 members, around 50 of whom do not have any printing press," a printing press owner told The Daily Star.

Even the committee Vice-president Humayun Kabir and Joint Secretary Mostaq Hossain do not have any printing press, said former leaders of BPIA and Publishers & Booksellers Association.

BPIA President Rabbani Jabbar denied the allegations against the association and said some of the former leaders of the association and printing press owners are bringing false allegations against him and the BPIA committee.

Every year, 240 printing press owners are given the work order for printing and binding the textbooks meant for free distribution among primary school and ebtedayee madrasa students while around 239 press owners are given the task for NCTB's secondary level textbooks.

Among around 7,000 printing presses across the country, nearly 5,000 are in the capital, mostly in Arambag-Fakirapul, Islampur-Nayabazar-Babubazar, Banglabazar-Sutrapur and Nilkhet 'printing zones'.