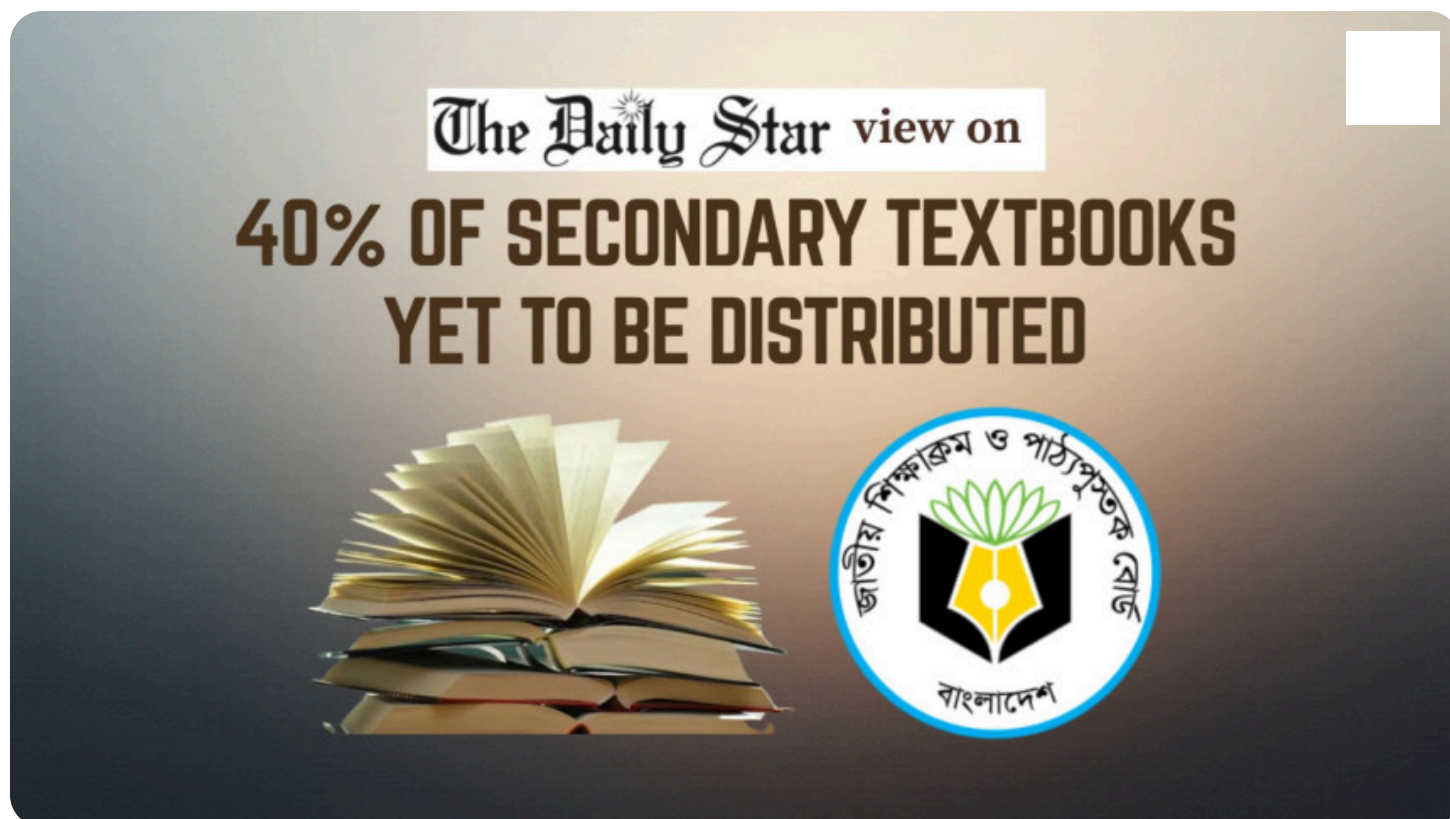


# Must textbook delays recur every year?

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This continuation exposes systemic failures, weak accountability



It is disheartening that thousands of secondary-level students will be attending classes in the new academic year without a complete set of textbooks. According to a report in this daily, more than 40 percent of the 21.43 crore textbooks for secondary-level students are yet to be delivered to schools. While primary-level students are expected to receive all their books on time, those in Classes 7 and 8 are facing the worst of the crisis, with many likely to get only a few of the 12 textbooks they need at the start of the year. In contrast, classes 6 and 9 are relatively better off. This exposes an uneven and poorly managed printing and distribution process.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) officials have pointed out several reasons for the delays, including cancellation of tenders for printing textbooks for Classes 6, 7, and 8 at a late stage, followed by retendering, delayed approvals from the ministry and procurement bodies, and slow contract finalisation. These setbacks were further compounded by inadequate manpower at the NCTB, the absence of a full-time chairman for months, and weak coordination with printing presses. Not anticipating these challenges, even after repeated failures in previous years, raises serious questions about institutional preparedness.

Printers have also pointed to systemic problems. Reportedly, most of the printing work was assigned to a small number of presses—nearly 80 percent of the total workload has been concentrated among a small group of around 20 printing presses—making it difficult to finish on time. Moreover, poor monitoring led to quality problems, and many substandard books had to be discarded after inspection, causing further delays. These failures show weak oversight and a lack of accountability at different stages of the process.

For the students, the impact of these failures will be severe. Starting the academic year without essential textbooks will disrupt their teaching plans, hamper learning continuity, and place unnecessary stress on both students and teachers. Regrettably, students are being told by the authorities to rely on PDF versions of textbooks, even though digital access remains uneven. The entire situation is frustrating.

Textbook delays have become a recurring problem in the country, with some schools in previous years receiving books months after classes began. This pattern must end. The authorities need to ensure timely tender finalisation, balanced allocation of printing work, stricter monitoring, and clear accountability for delays. Providing every student with a full set of textbooks on the first day of the academic year should be a basic obligation of the authorities. Students must not pay the price for administrative failures.