

Under fire, NCTB moves to fix textbook errors

Committee formed; report expected in 7 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of widespread criticism over some embarrassing blunders in school textbooks, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board has finally formed a review committee to find out and then correct the mistakes.

The three-member body led by its member (finance) Prof Kazi Abul Kalam will submit the report within seven working

days, NCTB Chairman Prof Narayan Chandra Saha told The Daily Star yesterday.

The reported mistakes may have happened at various levels and the committee will track it down, he said.

Soon after the government started distributing some 36.21 crore copies of textbooks among 4.26 crore students of pre-primary, primary and secondary students on January 1, a sizeable number of errors

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Under fire

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and anomalies, including spelling mistakes, wrong arrangements of paragraphs and omission of articles, hit newspaper headlines. The issue also triggered a firestorm of protests on social media platforms.

Many took to Facebook to share the goofs, in some cases with exaggeration, and express their resentment over NCTB's role.

On Thursday, Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman said the mistakes would be corrected.

The NCTB authorities have already been asked to take steps to this end, he told reporters at a programme at Khamarbari in the capital.

SOME BLUNDERS

Chapter 12 of class one's Bangla textbook deals with identifying the alphabet. As the chapter proceeds, the Bangla letter ৩ (O) is accompanied by the sentence along with a picture of a little girl: I want a scarf (*orna*).

This drew huge flak as, many argued, the word is gender-bias: It's a piece of garment worn by adult girls and women. And it's not something that boys and girls as old as five or six would like to learn from their textbook.

"I find no rationale behind this attempt to teach students a letter with the help of this particular piece of clothing. What would the teachers say if the students asked them about the use of an *orna*?" said Hasibur Rahman, a parent.

But consider this: Do not "heart" anybody. So reads the translation of a moral advice -- *hauke aghat dio na*. The translation should have read, "Do not hurt anybody."

This particular goof-up on the back cover of "Hindu Shiksha" for class-III students of English version raised serious questions about the quality and seriousness of those behind formulating textbooks.

In the class-III Bangla textbook, the famous rhyme "Adarsha Chhele" written by Kusumkumari Das has lost its original order.

In the textbook, the rhyme begins inaccurately. The first line reads *amader deshe shei chele kobe hobe* instead of *amader deshe hobe shei chhele kobe* (when the country will have such a boy).

More mistakes follow in the poem.

In the same book, the poem "Boi" (book) written by Humayun Azad has been dropped.

Hefajat-e Islam, a Qawmi madrasa-based organisation, and Bangladesh Awami Olema League have been demanding the exclusion of some of

the poems written by "Hindus and atheists".

Many have alleged that some poems and prose have been dropped from Bangla textbooks of different classes as per the demand of the two groups.

There are also numerous spelling mistakes in the textbooks.

'DONE IN A HURRY; WITHOUT SKILLED PEOPLE'

Prof Akhtaruzzaman, who was head of a 15-member national textbook expert committee formed in 2009, said mistakes in textbooks happened mainly because the NCTB did the job in such a hurry that the authors and the editors got little time to go through the texts.

"From my experience of editing a textbook, I can say that the people who do this job do not get enough time to go through each line properly," he told The Daily Star on Thursday.

More alarmingly, the NCTB does not have professional people for editing and proofreading, he added.

Echoing his view, noted educationist Rasheda K Choudhury said writers and editors should be given adequate time and honorarium.

"At the same time, their accountability must be ensured," she said.

A former primary education adviser to a caretaker government, Rasheda said that those involved with formulating textbooks must consider whether the contents are appropriate for the kids.

Rasheda, also the executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said the volume of textbooks is increasing every year and therefore time has come to rethink about NCTB's role.

The NCTB should be divided into two parts -- one will deal with the quality of textbooks and the other will look after the printing jobs like procurement of papers and tendering, she suggested.

Renowned academician Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, a former Dhaka University teacher, said there were some qualified people in the NCTB, but they were sidelined by "politically influential people and sycophants".

Such mistakes happen when skilled people cannot work properly, he noted.

And like in other government offices, a group of fundamentalists is working in the NCTB too, said Prof Manzoorul, who was involved with the formulation of a textbook of higher secondary level.

"This group tries to implement its agenda whenever it gets the chance. We often see its reflection in the textbooks," he said.