



Textbook delay costs 2 academic months

Students buying books at higher prices; serious spelling mistakes and factual errors alleged

SHAHNNAZ PARVEEN

Millions of schoolchildren in the capital city and elsewhere have already lost almost two months of the academic year 2008 for not getting the necessary textbooks due to delay in delivering those by the authorities.

Students said the delay in getting new books has affected their study and it will be difficult for them to finish the course in time.

Moreover, the primary and secondary textbooks available in the market bear enormous spelling mistakes, factual errors, poor quality paper and frail binding, though the students and guardians had to pay higher prices for those.

"Teachers give us lessons from old raggedy books but we could not follow or finish our home works because we are yet to get all the necessary books," said Meem, a class eight student of Donia AK High School and College in the city.

"I had only three books -- in Bangla, English and Math -- in

January," she added.

Iffat Kabir, a class eight student of Mohammadpur Preparatory Higher Secondary Girls School said, "I had Bangla second paper class test on February 16 but I could not buy new books on the subject before February 15."

"Marks of class tests are added to the total marks at the end of the year. So the delay in getting books will affect my results," she added.

"After buying the new books in mid-February I discovered that one of the books had upside down print in several pages. The binding is falling apart. There are two different colours of paper in one book," added Iffat.

A class six student of Railway Government High School said, "I have managed several used books from one of the senior students. They are raggedy and have scribbles all over. And I feel bad starting with someone else's old books."

According to National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), around 1.93 crore copies of secondary level textbooks

have been printed this year. Eighteen lakh more books were expected to hit the market in a day or two. But publishers said still there will be a shortage of around 32 lakh books.

The books are printed and marketed through 155 printing and publishing houses.

The usual printing season of textbooks is from November to March. Secondary level books are usually printed in three phases and marketed by January 21.

Most parents and students said they had to pay additional Tk 10 to 12 for each book although secondary level books are supposed to be sold at a subsidised price.

Monirul Islam Bhuiyan, a resident of Donia, said, "I had to go to Banglatabazar five times till mid February to buy the whole set of books for my son. But I did not get more than three books before the end of January."

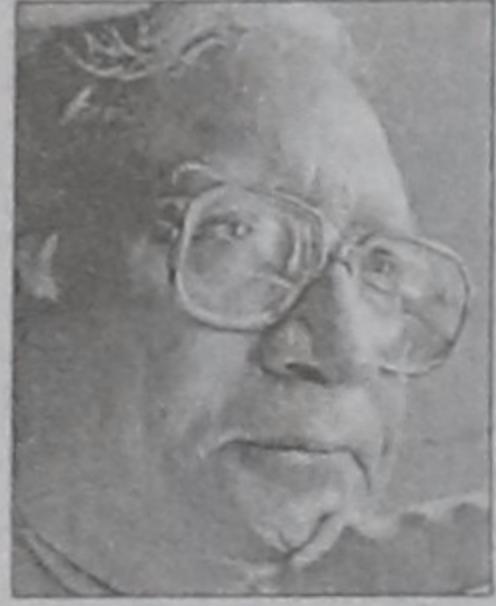
The sellers asked for more than the original price. I had to pay double the price for the entire set," he alleged.

Ashit Das, father of a class two



EXPERTS ON THE TEXTBOOK SHORTAGE

Waste of time forces them to go too fast



Experts say the shortage of textbooks and delay in getting them have serious effect on the students and their parents.

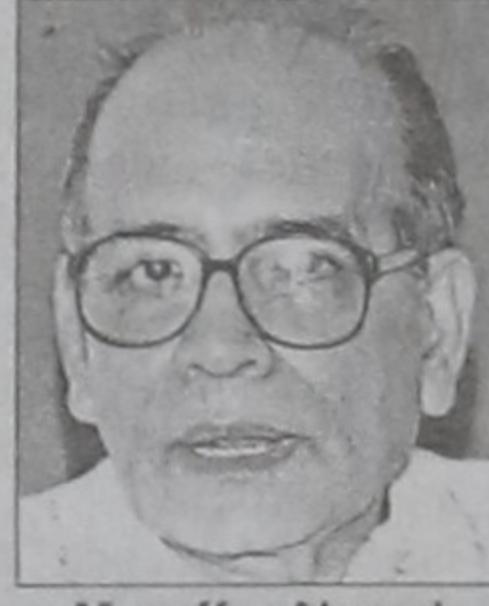
"Promotion from one class to another is like an adventure for a student. Getting new books, their fresh smell, all the new stories and poems in them are supposed to be exciting for the children. But unfortunately our students have to start every new academic year with a disappointment. This disappointment affects their frame of mind. They lose interest in study," said noted academician Prof. Serajul Islam Choudhury.

He said the total amount of time the schoolchildren get to complete their syllabus is not adequate. Moreover, the waste of time at the beginning of the academic year forces the students to gobble down the syllabus too fast without really learning anything.

"Those who are accountable for bringing out textbooks need to realise the magnitude of their responsibility and how much damage the yearly mismanagement is causing for children and the entire education system of the country," Prof. Serajul said.

"This is not just a setback for only one person or a school. There is a bigger picture. This affects all Bangladeshi people collectively. It is forcing our children to lag behind," he said.

It has become regular feature, just stop it



One of the leading experts of education policy Professor Muzaffer Ahmad said the current textbook crisis in the country is a general reflection of the education sector of Bangladesh. The crisis has become a regular phenomenon and it has to be altered.

"Unavailability of textbooks at the beginning of every academic year delays classes. It has serious impact on the education, especially when we are trying to increase the literacy rate in the country," said Prof. Ahmad, one of the winners of this year's Ekushey Padak.

Prof. Ahmad suggested that the current monopoly of bringing out textbooks only through National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has to be altered.

"There should be multiple choices for schools and students. There are many publishers bringing out high quality books," he pointed out.

"NCTB can approve a list of books for the schools. The school management will select the appropriate and best ones from the list. This is being practised in many countries around the world," Prof. Ahmad said.

student at Siddheshwari Girls High School, said, "I managed several used books in January but I did not want my kid to start her school year with old books. She did not find her studies interesting because of old books."

Headmasters of different government schools of the city complained of serious spelling mistakes in different books. "Teachers have to correct the spellings when they give lessons. There are factual errors too," said one of the headmasters on condition of anonymity.

The teachers said they would take makeup classes during holidays to complete the syllabus in time. "We have to take makeup classes almost every year either for book shortage or for other problems such as political programmes," said another teacher.

Asked about the ongoing shortage of books, Abu Taher, president, Bangladesh Publishers and Booksellers Association said, "This year the textbook board made a mistake in assessing the demand for textbooks. Usually they sit with us before the printing season and

we fix an estimated number of books to be printed, but this time they did not sit with us."

"Many children in Bangladesh usually rely on old books because they cannot afford to buy new ones. Around 30 percent of the demand is met by old books. The average demand is ascertained based on this percentage," he said.

Taher mentioned that this year secondary students opted for new books for various reasons which might have created the crisis.

Explaining the possible reasons, he said many new topics including liberation war and rights of the physically challenged have been added in the new textbooks of class 6, 7 and 8. The 2010 examination will have new form of questions and rules. Samples of these questions have been printed in the new books for class 9.

"This is one of the reasons why the students have opted for new books. Another reason is the Vocational Education Board has started to use NCTB books from this year. The vocational students have bought around 80,000 books, creating additional

pressure," he observed.

"We informed NCTB about the book shortage verbally on January 17 and officially on January 20. We also held meetings on January 27 about the textbook crisis and distribution mismanagement. However, they still remain silent," Taher said.

Contacted, Professor Dr M Masir Uddin, chairman, National Curriculum and Textbook Board, admitted the shortage of books.

He said, "We are aware of the secondary level textbook shortage in the market. The problem is being addressed. Eighteen lakh new books are now in printing process. The new lot will hit the market by February 24."

"We have also identified a disparity between the prices of paper and primary level books. NCTB always gives subsidy on paper so that guardians can buy textbooks at a low price," he said replying to a question of higher prices of books.

"We are working to find a permanent solution to the crisis that comes almost every year. We are trying to find out a solution that will be acceptable to everyone," he said.

DCC playing dubious role on public places

TAWFIQUE ALI

The role of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in maintaining the city's parks, playgrounds and open spaces has always been dubious, leaving these public places in a deplorable state.

Though custodian of most of the city parks and playgrounds, the DCC has miserably failed to provide the city dwellers with the minimum breathing space, said eminent city dwellers.

The aggrieved people alleged that the DCC authorities have consistently let the scanty open spaces to be misused, plundered or destroyed by certain quarters.

Prof. Serajul Islam Choudhury, head of an advisory committee on DCC's park development and beautification, said that the city corporation must be accountable for what role it has been playing to conserve the parks and playgrounds.

"Wasteful use of the playgrounds is unacceptable and it is all the more unacceptable when DCC itself indulges in it," he said. "It is very unjust to use a playfield on commercial basis."

Despite widespread public outcry, the DCC rents out the playgrounds allowing commercial events like fair, music concerts and wedding ceremonies in exchange of money, denying the community of their right to open space and sporting facility, alleged locals.

Apart from Kalabagan Krira Chakra occupying Kalabagan Children's Park, Dhanmondi Club using Dhanmondi playground, Dhanmondi Cricket Academy occupying a children's park and Gulshan Youth Club occupying Gulshan Central Park, there are more examples.

According to a survey of June 2007 conducted by DCC, Shahid Park (Makil Park) in Mohammadpur is being used commercially. Shyamoli Shishu Mela (children's park) is being used as a commercial amusement park.

Narinda Shishu Park has been divided into several portions. A clubhouse occupies Outfall Staff Quarter Shishu Park (ward no. 86). Iqbal Road Shishu Park (Udaya Jatra ground) in Mohammadpur and Hazaribagh

Kasaitola Park are in possession of two clubs.

Dhukhola playground (DCC ward no. 81) has been occupied with a rent-a-car office, rental cars, public toilet and a restaurant, says the DCC survey. One portion is occupied with a rickshaw garage, a shop of construction materials and two other shops.

As per findings of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok (Bapa), Haji Alim Eidgah Math in Baksibazar is at the disposal of Orient Cricket Academy. The academy is sponsored by a company that uses the playground for loading and unloading of goods of the company. A kitchen market is located within the playground.

Shyamoli pisciculture playground is in possession of Shyamoli Club and a kitchen market.

Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad, said DCC is duty-bound to preserve and protect open space for the people as obligated by its institutional mandate.

"But the DCC has consistently been apathetic to conservation

of open space and devoid of commitment, as the corporation itself has destroyed a good many open spaces in the old part of Dhaka," said Prof. Ahmad. "My perception is that DCC is beneficiary of illegal money making game out of parks and playgrounds by different sections."

President of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) Mubasshar Hussain said DCC takes monetary benefits renting out playgrounds for different commercial purposes particularly in the way of arranging cattle markets in connivance with some sports clubs.

DCC rented out the playground of Gulshan Central Park to an organisation to hold a fair of handicrafts on December 1, and then a wedding ceremony on December 26 last year. The field remained occupied with such functions throughout January this year.

A source at the DCC Estate Department said that DCC earns Tk 23,334 per day renting out the Gulshan Central Park playground.

Shirin Shila, joint general

secretary of Gulshan Society, said use of playgrounds for fair and concerts creates nuisance in the residential area. Traffic congestion takes such a proportion that it becomes very difficult for the residents to move in the locality.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) presently runs grocery shops at many of the city's children's parks and playgrounds.

However, the city mayor has expressed his ignorance over the alleged moneymaking game with parks and playgrounds and their abuse.

Former adviser to the youth and sports ministry and Bapa Vice-president SM Shahjahan said that it is obviously an abuse of public playgrounds. "I think the government should take stern action against such impropriety of public space," he said.

He also said the National Sports Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports can play a vital role in this regard. The ministry in a recent letter directed the authorities concerned, including the DCC, not to use playgrounds for purposes other than sports and games.

