

Crisis In Text Book Publication

—Khalilur Rahman

THE production of quality text books for the school students, faces serious crisis largely due to the absence of a healthy competition among the competent authors and free flow of thinking. The Bangladesh School Text Book Board is solely entrusted with the job of preparing books and their distribution through Education Directorate and appointed agents.

There are about 116 text books from Class I to Class X and the Text Book Board engages writers for writing the books in two ways, either by commission or through announcements inviting manuscripts from the authors in respective field. The manuscripts are then scrutinised by a board of examiners constituted by the Board. On the basis of recommendations by the board of examiners, text books are approved for production.

Of the 116 text books a few are changed or thoroughly revised every year. New books are introduced phase by phase, said some renowned publishers who are in the field of publication for quite a long time. Some of the publishers told me that under the present system it is not possible to have quality text books for the school children as the School Text Book Board enjoys absolute monopoly on it. Referring to a book on science subject for the students of Class IX, the publishers said that they themselves took the challenge of publishing the book by inviting available efficient writers on science subject and did it which is now one of the best books on the subject and Board had to approve it. The remuneration paid to the writers of the book was much higher than usually paid by the Board.

Some publishers told me that there are writers who find it convenient to lend their names in books while other obscure persons write those for the Board. In case of commissioning of writers the Text Book Board selects a group of writers from va-

rious educational institutions, mostly who are known authors in different fields and assign them to write books on various subjects. On the other hand, the authors who are invited to submit manuscripts through notifications by the Board very often feel uncertainty because nobody knows whose books would be acceptable after scrutiny. So the number of competitors from among the able writers becomes less as a result new and inexperienced hands come in whose merit has not been tested.

Before liberation of Bangladesh the School Text Book Board used to invite criticism about their books and would distribute awards to the best critics. But this system of inviting public opinion in respect of text books, produced by the board, has been abolished.

A group of elderly publishers said that the book industry had received a severe jolt since the introduction of monopoly business over the text books and the creation of the Text Book Board in 1954.

had there been opportunity for them to prepare manuscripts by authors with vast knowledge and experience and the changing needs of the present day and approved by the authority as text books for elementary classes through competition there was chance of producing quality books, some teachers opined. Monopoly business with text books, now in force, has blocked this prospect, they added.

Some old publishers, a few of whom started book business about half a century ago viewed that even if they are allowed to do the job of preparing books by meritorious authors it would be an uphill task for them because situation has so much deteriorated.

On the other hand the present position is no better in case of distribution of text books throughout the country in time. Full one month (January) of a new academic year is already over but the full set

of text books for Class IX and Class X is yet to reach the students. A spokesman of the Text Book Board said that the publication of books for Class IX and Class X suffered serious dislocation due to the publication of voters' lists by the printing houses.

The Board assigned the job of publishing the books for Class VIII and Class IX to about 225 publishers, all based in Dhaka. They are required to publish 32 lakh books for Class VIII and Class X. Some of the publishers assigned to publish the books complained that only in November last they got the manuscripts from the Board and it was not possible to produce the books within two months time and release those from January 1. It requires at least four months to publish a set of 35 text books, 10 for Class—VIII and 25 for Class IX. Text books for Class IX and Class X are the same. All the publishers whom I met categorically said that delay in supplying the manuscripts to them by the Board has resulted in the delay in publication. The Board could supply the manuscripts much earlier.

Another publisher said that some manuscripts are yet to be received by them. One of which is the art book for Class IV. The Board handed over the manuscript of Algebra for Class IX only a week ago.

The authors of the books go through the proof and the final proof is seen by the Board Officials. It is such a time consuming process that most of the time the allottee publishers hunt the authors and the Board officials for correcting proof. The Board has asked the allottee publisher for arithmetic book of Class—IX to show the proof of the book to 'Ganit Samity' an association of mathematics teachers. The association, in turn, has assigned another man to go through the proof who resides at a far off place and was hardly available for the purpose, it is alleged. The publishers feel that the number of officers

should be increased by the Board for going through the proof.

STOCKPILE OF BOOKS

With regard to the books for Class—VIII the Board said all the books were available in adequate quantity and there is no shortage at all, a spokesman of the board added. The publishers say the books for Class—VIII were published in previous three years far above the requirements and these remain stockpiled at the distributors' godowns. In 1981 four lakh books and in 1982 two lakh books were published for Class—VIII and this year the Board has authorised to publish one and a half lakh copies. Some publishers expressed apprehension that even 20,000 copies from the current year's stock will not be sold out as there is a huge stock of books for Class—VIII remain stockpiled, a carryover of previous years. The statistics of actual requirements of books is lacking resulting in such a situation, the publishers opined.

Such is the case with books for Class—VI and Class—VII. The number of books published last year for these two classes was so huge that publication of these books will not be necessary even in 1985 the old stock will meet the requirements. The Board is in charge of publication of the books for Classes—IV, V, VI and VII and distribution of these through appointed agents on commission at different rates ranging from 15 to 22 and a half per cent. Whereas the distribution of books from Class—I to Class—III are distributed through Education Directorate (Primary) these are distributed (from Class—I to Class—III) free of cost. There are complaints that certain amount of subscriptions are taken from the students of primary schools for the books which they are supposed to get free of cost. Money thus raised in the form of subscriptions is needed by those who run for procuring the books from thana based education offices.