

# Printing of textbooks for primary schools delayed

## Deadlock over conditions in tender

By Gobinda Bar

Supply of textbooks to the primary school students is expected to be delayed at least by a month as there has been a discord between printers and the government over conditions of tender.

Distribution of textbooks among the students are scheduled to start on January 1 next year while supply of books to the district headquarters is to be completed by December 31 this year.

Press owners and publishers say they will not participate in the bidding for printing primary textbooks as they are financially unable to do the 'big packages' as required in the tender which has 'tough' conditions.

No schedule has so far been sold since floating of the tender in the last week of June. The tender will be open on August 1.

The entire tender for printing, binding and making delivery of 5.80 crore books to district headquarters has been divided into 111 packages. Of the total, 54 packages are financed by the World Bank (WB) and the rest 57 by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Four of the WB-financed packages involve Tk 90 lakh to Tk one crore each while the rest is worth Tk 6 to Tk 10 lakh each.

The total contribution by the WB and the ADB to the project is around Tk 14 crore. The government will bear the expenditure for paper.

Sources said no printer has bought any tender schedule as yet. They are thinking of formally announcing abstention from the bidding because of the 'hard tender conditions', the sources added.

"If none of the printers participate in the bidding, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) shall have to cancel the tender. In that case, the tender procedure will take one more month and the official formalities for final approval might take another one month, pushing the entire procedure for completion by October," said a source. If so happens, he said, both printing and supply of books will be delayed because the printing cannot be

completed in one and a half months.

The deadline for printing books is December 15 while delivery of the books to the district headquarters would have to be completed by December 31.

Printers say no press has the capacity to do the huge work of any of the packages by meeting all the conditions.

Leaders of the press owners' association (POA) said a printer will have to keep around Tk 18 lakh as bid bond, excluding the 10 per cent 'performance guarantee' for doing every package worth Tk 10 lakh each. They say no printer can pay that amount of money and that none has the capacity to show

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'solvency certificate' and 'line of credit' as required by the tender.

Moreover, presses shall have to pay in advance 30 per cent of the total cost of papers. They will have to pay Tk 1000 for each rim of paper though the government acquired it at a rate of Tk 500 per rim, printers say. Apart from the four largest packages, each of the 107 packages needs 6000 rim papers, POA leaders said.

The amount of the bid security money has also been raised to Tk 10,000 from Tk 4,000.

There are around 700 press across the country with double demy and double crown size offset printing machine suitable for printing the textbooks, the POA sources said.

A POA leader said the WB and the ADB have set the conditions of the tender taking advantage of project financing. The tender was called without assessing the real situation and capacity of the printers, he said.

"This tender will help foreign printers to come here and take over the printing market," he said.

Shah Alam, general secretary of the association, accused the NCTB of 'creating the mess and uncertainty in printing the textbooks.'

"Despite knowing the fact about the capacity of our printing industry, NCTB officials did not discuss the matter properly with the government policy makers and the development partners.

"Some of the NCTB officials are out to satisfy their evil motive by designing the tender in such a way that no local printer can participate in the bidding. They have set the terms and conditions of the tender in a way so that it discourages participants in the bidding. This will help increase the tender price from which the NCTB officials will be benefited."

"More than one lakh families of the workers involved in the press industry are now exposed to uncertainty as the NCTB has sold out the national interest to the WB and the ADB," the POA leader said.

Rabbani Jabbar, general secretary of Bangladesh Book Sellers' and Publishers' Association feels that the imposition of 'tough tender conditions' is motivated. He said the present tender proposal was not feasible for the printers.

"Under the present tender conditions, a very few printers may participate, but for the sake of quick printing of the textbooks, large participation is required," said Rabbani.

NCTB chairman Mohammad Shaokat Ali brushed aside all the excuses and allegations of the POA, saying, "as far as I am concerned, they will participate in the tender."

The printers are creating undue pressure on the NCTB to have the tender according to their will so that they can make more profit, he said.

Regarding the alleged 'ill motive' of the NCTB officials in handling the tender process, the chairman said, it was totally transparent and the NCTB officials cannot find any interest in the printing process because the books are not for sale. "Moreover, there is no scope for irregularity as the NCTB books are audited regularly," the chairman said.