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School Textbook Chaos

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is the authority to print and distribute school textbooks in good time for the academic session that coincides with the calendar year. They have listed publishing houses to bring out the books. But the distribution mechanism appears to be two-some: the bulk of the books are routed through the district education authorities and thana education officials for delivery at the school level while there are also listed local agents who sell primers printed on newsprint at a nominal price. Books printed on white print coming from the donors carry the label reading "For Free distribution."

The system looks broken down from the front-page report in our daily yesterday that revealed a partial hijacking of the authority of the NCTB and the printing and distribution roles of the listed publishers and dealers, to put it mildly. Some publishing houses seem to have got into the act of printing primary school textbooks without authorisation. A bunch of dealers have also surfaced to sell such books illegally. The result is: books to be had for free or at nominal prices have been selling at blackmarket prices. Parents who should have got the textbooks from schools are going to the market to fetch them.

The basic reason behind this mess which has been annular in its recurrence, to be candid, seems to be the laggard printing of books. Although we are into the second week of February, 'printing is yet to be completed for the failure to supply paper as per requirement', according to the Press Owners' Association sources. The NCTB's claim is that textbooks have been duly supplied to all the districts. We would like the NCTB to enlighten the public on where we stand in terms of the textbook situation. Meanwhile the textbook board is urged stir up its listed publishers and agents to chasten the wayward elements within their associations who are giving them a raw deal.