

# Guidebook trade behind artificial textbook crisis

Syndicate of publishers, traders manipulates supply, prices

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Some unscrupulous school textbook publishers in collusion with some dishonest government officials are creating an artificial crisis of textbooks on the market, to boost the sales of so-called guide books, also published by them.

Secondary school students are being forced to turn to guidebooks sold on the market since they are not being able to follow the school curriculum due to the false textbook crisis.

Sources said a syndicate of publishers including some who won government tenders for publishing textbooks, are delaying distribution of secondary level textbooks to hike up the sales of their guidebooks.

According to the Notebook Prohibition Act-1980, no notebooks or such type of books of up to Class VII can be printed and marketed. Besides, no notebooks of above class VIII can be printed or marketed without permission of the National Curriculum

and Textbook Board (NCTB).

While students of class VI to X are yet to get the textbooks even after one and half months since the academic year began, different types of guidebooks are flooding the market all over the country, despite a recent crackdown on unscrupulous publishers initiated by the government.

The publishers are also spending a huge amount of money for advertising their guidebooks, including TV advertisements.

The top guidebooks on the market at the moment include Panjeri from Panjeri Publication Ltd, Janani from Hasan Book Depot, Anupam from Kajal Brothers, Lecture from Lecture Publication Ltd, Anushandhan from Chaki Kalpona Publications, Jupiter from Jupiter Publications, Talent from Ideal Publications, Diganta from Popular Library, Galaxy from Galaxy Publications, Popi from Popi Publications, Star from Biswa Parichoy Publication Ltd, and Jhalak from Moushumi Publication.

Sources in the education ministry and

NCTB alleged that the syndicate works in collusion with some dishonest top officials of the textbook board.

Many of those publishers win government tenders to print textbooks, some of which they get under their own names and some more they get under fake names, with the help of their official partners in crime.

The syndicate then creates an artificial crisis of textbooks on the market by delaying printing and distribution, and in the meantime they do extra business by flooding the market with their guidebooks.

NCTB sources alleged that Hasan Book Depot alone won tenders worth Tk 22 crore using names of 67 publishers, with the help of NCTB officials in exchange for kickbacks.

Sarker and Sons, Anannya Traders, Abdullah and Sons, Popular Library, Janata, Moushumi, Offset Press, Alamgir Press, and City Publication also won more than one tender each under fake names through similar deals, the sources added.

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## Guidebook trade

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The education ministry on February 5 formed a taskforce comprised of personnel from Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police, and NCTB with Rab Additional Director General Col Reza-nur-Rahman Khan as its head to solve the persisting crisis.

Due to a crackdown by the taskforce, some publishers were not able to hoard 24 types of textbooks of the third phase of NCTB's distribution. However, the taskforce has yet to make any headway in making 14 other textbooks of the first phase, and 38 textbooks of the second phase available on the market.

NCTB divided its distribution of the textbooks into 3 phases according to importance of the books--the 14 most important ones are in the first phase, 38 are in the second phase, and in the third phase there are 24 textbooks.

Although the deadlines for releasing the books of the first and second phases were in January, the books are still scarce on the market.

Taking advantage of the artificial crisis, some unscrupulous book retailers are also making quick bucks forcing the guide books on buyers. If a buyer does not buy a guidebook, the retailers charge higher prices for the textbook.

Those book retailers charge around Tk 20 to Tk 40 for a textbook, while they sell a guidebook for the textbook for Tk 150 to Tk 250. The Daily Star found, investigating the business practice of several book stores in the capital's Nilkhet and Bangla Bazar areas, prominent for book markets.

"The unavailability of textbooks is now a national crisis. We will not tolerate any irregularity and will take tough legal actions against publishers, if we find them hoarding textbooks," said taskforce chief Col Reza-nur-Rahman Khan.

seven years or can be fined up to Tk25,000 or both.

But due to lack of enforcement of the law, publishers continue to print and market notebooks changing the name to guidebook.

As per the law, 'note-book' means any printed book that contains notes, annotations, explanations, comments, references, answers or solutions to any question on any subject or matter, or translations or paraphrases of any part of the text-book but does not include any such book published by or under the authority of the Board.

According to the given criteria for notebooks, almost all guidebooks available in the market can be considered notebooks.

The Mobile Court Ordinance-2007 empowers mobile courts to take legal actions against those involved in printing and selling notebooks in the market without permission from the NCTB.

But usually no action is taken against the publishers and sellers of such books.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj said they will take necessary steps in consultation with the education ministry to resolve the textbook crisis.

"We shall take actions immediately against the unscrupulous publishers who have created artificial crisis in the market," the state minister told The Daily Star.

He also said the publishers were not able to hoard the third phase books as the taskforce on February 7 gave them a 24-hour ultimatum for releasing the books, and again reminded them about the directive on Tuesday.

"The taskforce is working round the clock on the matter," he said.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said steps will be taken according to the task force's report, which is due on February 20.

NCTB Chairman Masir Uddin Ahmed blamed the crisis on the unscrupulous publishers.

The publishers however claimed that the shortage of books was bound to occur, even if all books had been released on time, since NCTB invited tender for printing only 2.62 crore books while the countrywide demand is for at least five crore.

This year, secondary level students will need fresh copies of all 76 of their textbooks, because of the introduction of a new method to the curriculum, called the 'creative question method'.

Usually 30 percent of old textbooks are re-used each year by the students, but due to the new curriculum that will not be possible this year.

The taskforce during its crackdown identified 14 publishers who illegally sold on open market the paper provided by NCTB on a subsidised rate for printing the textbooks.

Four publishers were also identified as hoarders of textbooks, the NCTB sources said.

### LAW PROHIBITING NOTEBOOKS

If anyone is found guilty of violating Notebook Prohibition Act-1980, the person might face rigorous imprisonment up to