

Textbook writers, editors must disclose changes

ERRORS and misprints in primary and secondary textbooks for the 2017 academic session are unpalatable. The errors and misprints detected so far have already created a furore on the media and, after a preliminary investigation, resulted in the suspension of the textbook board's chief editor and a senior expert and the termination of the job of an illustrator, with two committees, set up by the education ministry and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, still working to establish the reasons for the mistakes. While changes in texts, arbitrarily or decidedly, have also come up for discussion, 13 writers and editors, all university teachers, on Wednesday issued a statement saying that they should not be held to account for the mistakes as they were not aware of the changes made in the text and the textbooks after what they have written and edited for publication. The statement further claimed that the board, giving in to the pressure that 'radical Islamists' mounted on relevant authorities, sowed 'sectarianism in the education system' by dropping 'secular and humanist' contents from the textbooks.

This strain of discussion has been around for quite some time; so has the other strain in which 'radical Islamists' have levelled allegations that the textbook board and the government have shifted the focus away from Islamic religious undertone in writing and adopting the contents. The situation has already been compounded enough as textbooks have already been published and distributed to the students. Yet all this needs to be resolved and the nation is willing to know what actually happened in the development of textbooks and their contents. Although the editorial board should reserve the right to judiciously adopt, exclude, include and change the contents, keeping to the principles of curriculum and syllabus design, the confusion that has arisen centring on the textbooks entails a responsibility on the writers and editors of the text to make public the changes that the government is reported to have made after the contents have been written and edited. They should do this in their own interest and also to help conscious section of society to stand up for them in case contents have been mutilated. The confusion also entails a responsibility on the textbook board and the government to let people know what changes they have made in the writers and editors' contents or find out the people responsible for changes in the text in case they have not changed the text at all.

Errors and misprints in the textbooks, as they are now, tend to indicate that the development of contents and the publication of textbooks have not been seriously looked after. But as textbooks shape millions of young minds, they should go through a rigorous process during their development and publication. Making the changes public by writers and editors and holding people responsible to account by the government will take the process a step forward.