

# Withdrawal of controversial textbooks recommended

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 24. The panel of three historians entrusted with the task of undertaking a "quick review" of the history books prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) today recommended their withdrawal. But, given the problems involved in withdrawing the textbooks in the middle of the academic year, the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry was guarded in its response to the recommendations made by the historians and has decided to monitor the situation before taking a final view.

Though the panel had been asked by the Ministry to remove the distortions and communally-biased portions from the textbooks since their withdrawal was impractical in the middle of an academic year, the three historians were of the view that the errors and biases were far too many and frequent to be corrected. "It is not advisable to continue with these texts for even a year," said a member of the panel and former Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, S. Settar.

Having arrived at this conclusion after three days of discussion and close scrutiny of the texts, the historians have recommended that the history textbooks brought out by the NCERT since 2002 be replaced with available reading material which conform to the NCERT syllabus for this academic year. They will study the available reading material in the country and make formal suggestions to the Ministry on the texts that could be used by schools using NCERT textbooks by July 5/6. Since no one text will be prescribed, the his-

torians have decided to evolve a question bank to facilitate the students. This question bank will be evolved with the help of school teachers and is likely to be ready by the first week of August.

About the prolonged uncertainty over the textbooks, a member of the panel and founder director of the Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute for Asian Studies, Kolkata, Barun De, said, "A lot of chaos has been created in the recent past over these textbooks. We are just asking for another month."

Prof. Settar did not rule out the possibility of the panel suggesting some of the earlier textbooks that had been replaced by the NCERT in 2002 as reading material.

Though of the view that the NCERT's National Curriculum Framework for School Education ought to be reviewed, the historians said that was a larger exercise which required more time. Also, they are of the view that textbook writing should be decentralised and not left to a few individuals but should reflect the collective wisdom of a number of scholars.

While asking Prof. Settar, Prof. De and the former Director at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies at Shimla, J. S. Grewal, to undertake the review, the Ministry had ruled out withdrawing the books this year. The Ministry had asked the panel to do a "quick review" and suggest what needs to be done in the short term. As per the Ministry's order of June 12, "If they so recommend, the Government will direct the NCERT and the Central Board of Secondary Education to issue appropriate directions to the teachers to transact the curriculum as per those recommendations."