

Intellectual Property

Book piracy a

By Salma

LAHORE, May 17: Weighed in the balance and found wanting. This emerges as a consensus among stakeholders on the plight of book publishing and trade in the country.

Though the books on myriad themes and topics have flooded the local market, any conscious effort to address the problems of poor quality of production, reprinting and above all rampant plagiarism remain a distant dream.

Book piracy or literary theft seems to be a growing concern among educationists, especially the writers of acknowledged standing and book lovers but for an ordinary student in a third-world country like Pakistan, a book has not much value other than a means to getting through the examination.

A vast majority of the book traders have even no idea of the

gravity of the offence they commit by infringing upon the Intellectual Property Rights. Reduced to plain language, the IPR infringement has become a standing menace to intellectual development in this part of the world.

The concept, which emphasises the importance of creativity and ideas in today's world of trade, films, music recordings, computer software and online services, besides books, has picked up steam here over the last couple of years. According to a piece of information, the International Intellectual Property Alliance puts the figure of loss the country faced on account of book piracy in 2004 at \$52 million.

Plagiarism is one of the leading vices falling in the domain of IPRs but a vast majority of publishers, especially in Urdu

Bazaar, are least bothered about any law or scruple.

Impressions of students recorded by *Dawn* during a survey reveals that the plagiarised and reprinted books are easily available in the market at affordable prices. The matter these books contain, they say, serves the purpose (of getting through the examination).

Ahmad Rehan Khan, a medical student at the Government College University, says some of the original versions of books on anatomy and other subjects cost as high as Rs5,000 which an ordinary student in Pakistan cannot afford to buy.

"Many a stall for the second-hand books provide the same contents in a few hundred rupees, though the quality of paperback printing is not all that good."

Rehan says it is very much the

PU's book fair opens

LAHORE, May 17: Punjab University vice-chancellor Arshad Mahmood and registrar Prof Dr Muhammad Naeem Khan on Wednesday evening inaugurated the Book and IT Fair 2006 amidst slogans shouted by the IJT activists.

Over 100 book sellers/publishers and IT companies have set up their stalls at the fair. The university has provided all facilities free of cost to the stalls while booksellers and publishers will offer discount up to 50 per cent to students. The three-day fair is open to all.

After inauguration, some booksellers registered their complaint with the vice-chancellor

that some activists of the Islami Jamiat-i-Talaba had collected money from them, which should be returned to them.

Speaking on the occasion, VC Arshad Mahmood said the Punjab University had decided to organise this fair to pay tribute to books and authors and encourage all segments of society, specially students, to discover the pleasure of reading. He said mental growth was associated with the acquisition of knowledge through books reading. He stressed the development of reading habit so that people could grow mentally.

The VC stressed publishers and booksellers to approach people

and encourage them to develop reading habits. He said the publishers should take books to the people rather than waiting for the people to come to the books. He said that it was also necessary to create general awareness about the importance of books for the mental growth of individuals. Once people will develop the reading habit, he said the demand for books would grow automatically.

Besides deans of all faculties, a large number of students participated in the inauguration ceremony.

REMOVED: The VC has removed student adviser Dr Niaz Ahmad for his failure to control certain students.—Staff Reporter

a bane or boon?

Salman Khan

about same case with books on the other subjects like literature and languages. He says Internet and other technological devices like CDs have eased the job of a student "who can download matter on any subject and reprint it for making assignments."

Many students are, however, conscious of the offence to the extent that they believe that it is the foremost responsibility of the government to check the illegal practice but only after assuring the students of availability of books at affordable prices.

The publishers dealing in the prescribed course for master's in English and language are selling the 'pirated' editions of original foreign works. For them it is like any other business; "no scruples, no regrets."

A major publishing house trader in Urdu Bazaar, who sells the MA English syllabus, denies the charge and says they have hired experienced teachers to write books for students. He, however, says the students prefer visiting the outlet because of "our affordable rates and quality of production."

He says the capable writers generally prefer to stay away from the business because they consider that the monetary reward is not commensurable with the work of creativity.

According to Sayyid Saadat Ali, another publisher, there is a misconception about the state of the book industry here. He says no body in our country is willing to spend a small amount on books, not to speak of the original works of craftsmen like William Shakespeare.

To substantiate the claim, he says he had displayed the master prints of the leading English lit-

erature figures almost a decade ago and these are still lying at the shop, as no-one is willing to spend two thousand rupees on it.

He says book reading has been relegated to a second place and very few people value it today. Most of traders in Urdu Bazaar, he says, have been on the same financial footing on which they stood five to 10 years ago.

Such stuff is fast disappearing from the city scene. He says even some 'big fish' in the market are selling the reprints of foreign books. Absence of serious buyers force the sellers to display their books at throwaway prices at book fairs.

Yet another shopkeeper quotes the ever-increasing prices of paper and high publishing cost as the major reason for inferior book-printing quality.

Prof Razi Abedi, a former chairman of the Punjab University English department, says the irony is that our students are made to study plagiarised books (those which bear fictitious names of authors) even for the most prestigious and emerging disciplines.

He says the MA English students in Pakistan study notes which the Indian market download from the works of masterminds, say, in the UK. "Genuine books are hard to find at affordable prices in the market these days," he says.

He suggests that the best way to cope with the situation is to motivate the local scholars by enhancing monetary rewards for authorship and providing them with a conducive environment to create original works according to the linguistic ability and the level of the students.

Besides, there should be ample scope for promoting translation work of masterpieces which, though not a substitute to the original works, certainly serves the cause of students. They enable the pupils to improve the stock of knowledge at their disposal.

The practice (translation) is prevalent in foreign countries as books of high merit, like Will Durant's "The Story of Philosophy" have been translated in many languages blossoming the minds of students with the precious though-content.

To fill the vacuum in the local market, Prof Abedi stresses that the government should give a serious thought to the idea of subsidising books for the students as the initiative was taken in the early 1970s when the government had bought rights from foreign companies.

He makes an interesting point that as many universities in the country have started producing PhDs in different disciplines, the day is not far when "we will have a good number of doctorate degree-holders in English alone who, however, will fail to do the job they are supposed to."

He says PhD meant training in research, which should help the scholar to utilise his experience in producing creative works. There is a greater delusion that research helps one teach in a better way, he says and adds "it rather becomes a stumbling block in the way of teaching."

There is an overall educational chaos in the country and only sincere efforts at the government level can help improve the scenario as the situation calls for, Prof Abedi pleads.