

Saving Community Primary School Teachers From Pitiabie Conditions

Muhammad Quamrul Islam

CONCERNED citizens say it is beyond comprehension why Government is yet to declare nationalization of community primary school teachers who are in worst conditions? True, by and large the demands of non-government colleges, schools and madrasahs have been accepted. Respective association for non-government education institutions have stopped their program returned resume classes, reported in the media. We are happy for that what could have been done earlier without forcing respected teachers take to street agitation. It is a matter of great regret declaration of nationalization of community primary schools by the government and giving them national pay scale are still awaited. We hope that would come now from government breaking the politico-bureaucratic tentacles.

Thanks to our national media that gave giving due coverage to just demands of teachers, irrespective of non-government or community for which readers countrywide are well aware of it, expect acceptance of demands as well as raise standard of education. National dailies on August 10, 2006 carried the news on organizations of non-government teachers-employees ultimatum to government, withdraw condition on salary payment of increased 10 percent, and Community Primary Teachers Association passed fourth day of their sit-in with shrouds at the Central Shaheed Minar with the demand for nationalization of their jobs. It can't miss the attention of the government, when non-government teachers would henceforth get cent per cent salary in the scale, from the government exchequer, demands of community primary teachers who are now paid Tk.750 per month consolidated, are yet to be given! An end to discrimination at primary education level is the need of the hour.

It is said presidents of those two organizations of non-government teachers-employees have strong links, known as pro-government. Isn't it, they are playing the issue to glorify their self, before the mainstream parties? If so, it is not befitting to a teacher. We are told what duress teachers-employees undergo in drawing monthly payment orders [MPOs] so far. Would it stop henceforth in payment of monthly salary, regularly on due date without *Tadbir* i.e. cajolery plus cash? Leaders, both teacher and bureaucracy, should look into it. We hope no organization of non-government teachers forced take street agitation again.

What is happening to ill fed ill-treated community primary teachers, living far below the poverty line, as their monthly income is **Tk.750 equivalent to about US \$11?** It is reported in national dailies on August 13, 2006 after **competing one week fast** at Central Shaheed Minar they will **continue it from that date** fastening eyes press nationalization of services. What more the government needs before accepting their genuine demands? A dead body from fast, for which the vested quarters in position and opposition are waiting; a septuagenarian political activist reacted?

If US\$1 is calculated a day for one to remain at poverty line; monthly requirement is US \$30, a credible economist on the on-going poverty reduction strategy paper, [PRSP] said. Now, at the lag end of the 5-year tenure of the 8th Parliament, it is in no way proper for Science and Information communication Technology [ICT] Minister Moyeen Khan to throw the PRSP, calling it a document of destroying the economy of the country, in front of World Bank Country Director Christine I Wallich. What he was doing as minister and member of the cabinet, the electorate can rightly demand his explanation? It is alleged he did it on August 5, 2006 show his support to different sections-a section of young leaders of BNP, **some millionaires cum CBA leaders**, some of Bangladesh Bank officials, those causing losses in nationalized commercial Banks [NCBs], state owned enterprises, and so on for cheap popularity.

People do not subscribe improper behavior of Dr. Moyeen Khan, when Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman was away in Washington, for money, needed for national budget. Khan owns an NGO, known as Khan Foundation accepted foreign donors fund, which extended Tk.42 crore, as donation to 35 organizations, for observe coming national elections. At the very start, question has been raised about neutrality of those organizations, as reported in national dailies on August 11, 2006, a civil society leader commented. These would be of no avail in this poverty and illiteracy ridden country where elections are mainly based on money, muscle and manipulation. It would have been better, if above donated fund could be given to countrywide school-teachers undertake election related works, civic education and so on. Look Election Commission is seeking cooperation of teachers for updating the electoral roll reported in the press on August 11, 2006.

Unless teachers are given due remuneration and respect democracy cannot flourish, that is the age-old tradition of this country destroyed by politicization. Seeing the photo of the community primary teachers published in national dailies on August 10 on fast unto death at Central Shaheed Minar I went there in the evening express the solidarity, and exchange views-that is what I can do. I stopped to see Poet Shamsur Rahman at Hospital BSMU, talked to his family members. At hospital I reminisced a day I met him in a poetry session in mid 1960s. We pray early recovery of poet, so dear and near to all. Saying Asr Namaz at Dhaka University mosque, reached Shaheed Minar. I found those fasters in deplorable conditions, which are yet to get positive assurances from the government. Alas, where is humanity!

I got a copy of memorandum, dated August 10, 2006, addressed to the Honorable Prime Minister regarding declaration of nationalization and national pay scale to the community primary schools and working teachers. It is not known yet, fate of said memorandum. We wish it reached her for favorable consideration. Keen in

view education is backbone of the country, education for all, and provides quality primary education; first BNP Govt. in democratic period from 1991 established 3778 community primary schools, countrywide. There are 10,565 working male and female teachers in those schools. Who is paid Tk.750 as honorarium per month. At this paltry sum it is not possible sustain self-even and not to speak of family. They were living pitiable life for a long time. By now, they exhausted all means each had and nothing to fall back upon. Exchanging views with them one can find this hard reality beyond doubt.

Let me share few tragic instances I learnt from them with the sympathetic readers. One married a female community teacher without dowry on his understanding wife will draw salary like others in government primary in due course. When he saw it is not so over the years he became furious. One day in rage he dealt blow with sharp implement that killed her. Second, one left his wife in house of his father-in-law; on condition he will not take her back unless Tk. 6 lakh is given, as the money she earns is not sufficient for a survival. Third, wife of a community primary teacher does not like taking money from father meet daily expenses; so she asked her husband leave the job and run a grocery shop, capital of which would be provided by her father. Despite his unwillingness, he had to accept it for a living. Fourth, press report showed a female community teacher committed suicide that was a leader of its association.

It is learnt project named low cost rural government primary schools were taken, under World Bank and Asian Development Bank funds, subsequently redesigned as community primary schools. All community primary schools have suitable accommodations, and the students receive stipends as usual in other educational institutions, only exception is- the teachers, who have been kept out of any increases in remuneration and facilities over the years. Although, every time they hoped for a change of lot like others in the government, and registered non-government primary schools whose salary paid by MPOs from public exchequer, discharging the same responsibility. But that did not materialize as a matter of course, which is ridden in this country by *Tadbir*, culture.

As a result, the community school teachers had no other alternative but launched many movements since 1997 when Awami League led consensus government was in power till to date in 2006 to realize just demands. But none of demands have been met, meanwhile, there has been a change of government installed a four party alliance led by BNP in 2001. The teachers earnestly hope, as 5-year tenure of ruling government would expire duly in next October, they would respond to their just demands before handing over power to the non-party caretaker government hold national elections. Otherwise, it would mean a push to frustration, starvation, indignity and death of deprived teachers. Reports are coming up in

the media, and cited. It should be within the knowledge of the government at different tiers, starting from upazila education officer upwards to directorate and ministry. Few are reported for fear of loss of dignity, and so on that their fellow distressed colleagues know.

On hunger strike from last June 18 to June 27 and sending a memorandum, government assured to meet the demands within a month. The Finance Minister told in the Parliament on June 29, 2006- just demands of community primary teachers would be met within July 25, 2006. But, as just demands have not been met, all community schools of country have been kept closed from August 1. Although teachers did not want it, what else they can do? Non-government teachers returned, getting 100% salary from the government. It is a step towards nationalization, free teachers from clutches of governing bodies, chaired by local MP, which was introduced by retired bureaucrat cum AL minister of education in the last government. It is ill luck of this country that once a bad practice is introduced against our long-standing tradition, it is not rectified but continues. Actors change only! This country is rated a most corrupt country in the world for last 5 years consecutively, no matter BNP in power or AL, dysfunctional Independent Anti-Corruption Commission is the outcome. There is no use in hiding this fact in this information age.

In the face of prevailing dismal situation community primary teachers have again taken fast unto death from August 6, 2006 at Central Shaheed Minar. National dailies of August 11, 2006 show photo of community primary teachers bringing out demonstration from the Central Shaheed Minar lying on the road, being obstructed by Police. Nobody cannot but be moved seeing the state of female teachers in fast movement and demonstration. When the government would feel tears and woes of teachers? Why government is delaying give them their dues over a decade? National budget provision should not be problem as it can be easily accommodated from block provision for 2006-07.

What's the use of keeping three types of primary school- community, non-government and government- in this least developed country extreme unequal distribution of income and endemic corruption? An education expert said such discrepancies occurred in quest for funds from donors, in bid satisfies donors in name of experiments, which was not at all needed; a look at what prevailing in West Bengal at primary level suffices. That was all for building facilities by department; politicized contractors connivance with politico-bureaucrats made money, that an open secret. **We earnestly request government accept one point demand for nationalization by community teachers**, to save 10,565 teachers from inhuman conditions of living and enable them carry the light of education to 10 lakh children.

The writer is a senior columnist, politician and economist