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# Muhith makes MPO pledge

*More institutions to be included in next budget; the minister criticises education ministry for not reforming MPO system*



Finance Minister AMA Muhith. Star file photo

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**Staff Correspondent**

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Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said some more private educational institutions would be brought under the Monthly Pay Order coverage in next budget with strict conditions as he criticised the education ministry for not reforming the MPO system.

"I have been trying to recast the MPO system for the last 10 years... but my efforts did not see the light. The education ministry thinks it is a safe arrangement [the way MPO enlistment is being done] for them," Muhith told a pre-budget discussion with the Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) at his Secretariat office.

"I formed a committee which was totally dysfunctional because the education ministry did not cooperate," the minister added.

He said despite resumption of the government's MPO facility, inclusion in the MPO would not mean only salary. A part of the grant would have to be spent on building infrastructure and procuring equipment, he added.

The minister observed that the education ministry's advice would not be taken in this regard and the money to be given under MPO system would have to be spent as per the finance ministry's guidelines.

Several thousand teachers of non-government institutions under the banner of different teachers' organisations took to the street in December and January. They observed programmes like hunger strike in front of the National Press Club demanding inclusion in the MPO.

They however called off their programmes following the prime minister's assurance of meeting their demand.

The MPO is the government's share in the payroll of teachers of non-government education institutions. Under the scheme, the government provides 100 percent of their basic salary. The system also gives them a monthly small amount as allowances.

After suspension of around six years initiated by the then BNP-led alliance government, the MPO facility was revived by the government in 2010 as it was one of the electoral pledges of the Awami League-led alliance. As many as 1,624 secondary and higher secondary private institutions were also given the MPO facility.

According to the leaders of Non-MPO Shikhya Pratishthan Shikhyak Karmachari Federation, there are 5,242 non-MPO institutions where around 80,000 teachers are working without any pay, some for more than a decade.

#### 'AL TO RETURN TO POWER'

At yesterday's pre-budget discussion, ERF president Saif Islam Dilal and his colleagues made some recommendations for the next budget. Those include introduction of afternoon shift in different private hospitals, yellow bus for education institutions and introduction of district budget in full scale.

Muhith said the primary schools were “almost nationalised” and all secondary schools in bad shape would also be nationalised.

The minister said if ruling AL assumed office again through the next general election, a large portion of power would be transferred to the districts and they would formulate their own budget.

He added, "I believe 100 percent that Awami League will return to power. Next time there will be substantial changes in governance and enormous empowerment opportunities would be created in the local government bodies."

The finance minister said he would take the initiative next year to introduce some yellow buses for schools to transport the children to and from their institutions.

Replying to a question on black money, Muhith said, "Why do you raise this question for nothing? I have stopped it much earlier. Now a permanent system prevails where there is a scope for regularising some money by paying a fine."

He said the talks on money laundering were exaggerated compared to the actual laundered amount.

On the local sugar industries, Muhith said their production cost was very high as they are dependent on sugarcane. Sugar is produced from bitumen abroad which is cheaper, he added.

Talking about his retirement plan, he said, "I am ready to go on retirement with full satisfaction. Most of my desires have been fulfilled in the last several years."

State Minister for Finance and Planning Abdul Mannan, Finance Secretary Muslim Chowdhury, NBR Chairman Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and ERD Secretary Kazi Shofiquel Azam also spoke.

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