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5,200 teachers losing hope on MPO inclusion

Mathews Chiran

Two years ago, Shahina Akter got her first job as an additional class teacher (ACT) in a madrasa in her village in Tentulia of Panchagarh.

Ever since she joined the institution, under a government project, she put in a sincere effort teaching science to students of sixth to tenth grade. Her job started to lessen the financial burden of her farmer father, as she started supporting her four-member family.

Shahina, who completed her masters last year, was assured by project officials that her job would be permanent and she would be enlisted in the government's monthly pay order (MPO) system as a regular teacher after the end of the project. She was planning to get married and settle down. But her plans suffered a blow, as her job was not made permanent even after the end of the project.

“For the last five months, I have been teaching my students at the madrasa every day without any payment from the government,” a frustrated Shahina told The Daily Star.

The project director and school principal insisted her to continue, she said. “That's why I am still doing it, with the hope that my job will be permanent. But there is no confirmation from anyone,” she added.

Shahina is only one of 5,200 ACT recruits from 2,100 educational institutions, who are living in uncertainty over their job.

To enhance the quality of education, the World Bank and government jointly started the project titled “Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project” (SEQAEP) in 2008.

These 5,200 men and women were recruited as ACT under the project on a temporary basis, to teach only English, Math and Science subjects at secondary level in 2015, as students' results in these subjects in public examinations were poor. They were teaching along with the regular teachers of the institutions.

The three-year contract with the teachers ended in December last year, and the ACTs are not receiving salaries from the government any more. However, many of the teachers receive a small honorarium from the institution since the project ended.

Yesterday, the teachers organised a press conference under the banner of Bangladesh ACT Association to voice their concerns and place demands to make their job permanent.

“Many teachers did not try for other government jobs as they were sure that their job will be permanent but it has not happened. Now their age for government job has expired. It is difficult for them to pursue another job, after spending years in teaching profession,” said Koushik Chandra Barman, president of the association.

The teachers said ACTs were supposed be included in MPO system as regular teachers as per the section 36 (Ka) and 36 (Kha) of the ACT manual, prepared by the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) under the Ministry of Education.

“We have been hearing the same old cliché for the last five months. But now we are losing our hope,” Koushik said.

Headmasters of different secondary educational institutions from different districts said ACTs have been very helpful for their educational institutions, and students want them to stay.

“There was no science teacher in my school but since the joining of an ACT, he has been teaching science, which have very useful for the students. We want the ACTs to stay,” said headmaster Sadirul Islam of BKK High School of Kharma village in Haluaghata of Mymensingh.

“If the government does not give their salary, it is not possible for us to afford them,” he added.

The project director, Mahmud-Ul-Haque, is currently abroad.

Contacted, Md. Asaduzzaman Khan Majlish, assistant director (ACT) of SEQAEAP, said there is a next project titled Secondary Education Development programme (SEDP) which is under process.

“Once the project starts, the ACTs of the SEQAEAP project will work under the SEDP. But it is the government who will decide whether these teachers will be enlisted under MPO facility,” he said.

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