



Ghagra College in remote Kawkhali upazila of Rangamati.

PHOTO: STAR

Five teachers for 700 students

No pay for teachers of the college in Rangamati for years

ANVIL CHAKMA with ANDREW EAGLE

A clever country invests in education. There can be no surer road to a nation's long-term betterment. But in remote Kawkhali upazila of Rangamati district it seems that higher education is not so important. There, fifteen years after the 2001 establishment of Ghagra College, the only college in the upazila, teachers are still awaiting pay.

According to college authorities, despite the commencement of classes in 2002 and the Chittagong Education Board's subsequent recognition of the college's board in time for the 2005 academic year, no monthly pay order, required to ensure teachers' salaries, has ever been set up.

Indeed, in 2005 in anticipation of a bright future for the college, students were admitted in three study areas: humanities, science and business. But unsurprisingly, without salary facilities for staff the college has been unable to provide full service or retain the teachers it needs. Through frustration the five remaining teachers, currently responsible for 700 enrolled students,

are tempted to leave as well.

"Our lives are rather bleak," says Obaidulla Khan, lecturer in the biology department, when asked how unpaid teachers cope. "It's very difficult to support our families financially."

"Due to the lack of monetary earnings our teachers really suffer," agrees the college principal, Syamal Mitra Chakma. "Ultimately teachers cannot attend to classes properly because they need to work outside for income." For teachers, private tuition is currently the main income provider.

Despite the institution's obvious limitations enrolments remain robust, says college management committee president Santi Mani Chakma. With more than 200 students achieving their Secondary School Certificate in Kawkhali upazila annually, healthy enrolment figures are to be anticipated. Besides, for many students there is no viable alternative.

"After completing my Secondary School Certificate," says a student of the humanities group Suprava Dewan, "I was admitted at Ghagra College. I have no ability to study in Rangamati town or elsewhere, but after admission I saw that

there aren't enough teachers here to teach us. I don't know what will happen to my life."

His scenario is common. Due to the tyranny of distance and the inability of many families to cover the cost of a student living away from home, Ghagra College is integral to the academic life of the upazila's coming generations.

"The college does not run properly due to the teacher crisis," says Suprava's guardian Putul Dewan, 45. "We are really concerned because our son's future is at stake."

"It's true that we can't provide proper service to our students due to the lack of teachers," agrees Santi Mani Chakma. "We raised the issue of implementing a monthly pay order with higher authorities of the education board without success, but we are hopeful that one day our staff will be properly paid."

While a lack of teaching salaries is foremost, it is not the only difficulty the college faces. "At first we need the monthly payment order," says the principal. "I am still hopeful we can get it. But we also need a student hostel since many of our students come from hillside villages far from the campus."