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INCREASING MONTHLY CONTRIBUTION FOR RETIREMENT BENEFITS

MPO teachers resent govt move

WASIM BIN HABIB

Resentment is brewing among non-government teachers and employees of MPO-enlisted schools and colleges as the government has decided to increase the amount of monthly contribution from their salaries for their retirement benefits and welfare allowances.

The associations of the teachers and employees have already staged demonstrations at different parts of the country demanding cancellation of the "controversial" decision to increase the amount to 10 percent from six percent now. They also threatened to wage a tougher movement if the government does not backtrack on its decision soon.

Till now, the government deducts six percent of the salaries of teachers and staffs enjoying MPO benefits. Of the six percent, four percent is

cut for their retirement benefits and two percent for their welfare allowances. After going into retirement, the teachers would get double the accumulated amount because of the same amount of government contributions.

However, the government announced last month that it would deduct 10 percent of the salaries. But there was no mention that the government contribution would also increase to 10 percent from existing six percent. The teachers and employees demand that if the government deducts 10 percent, it should contribute the same amount to their retirement funds.

The non-government teachers and employees' welfare trust and the retirement benefit board under the education ministry give these benefits.

Last month, the education ministry issued two gazette notifications, increasing the amount for

retirement benefits to six and welfare allowance to four percent. According to the notification, the decision is supposed to be effective from this month.

The issuance of the gazettes triggered an outcry among the teachers.

"It is completely irrational and unacceptable," said Azizul Islam, convenor of the National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), a joint platform of national level organisations of teachers and employees. "The teachers are extremely aggrieved and want its cancellation."

He said leaders of the associations were not informed about the matter beforehand. Even they were not consulted, while the association involves more than five lakh teachers and employees, he added.

"The gazettes did not say anything about what

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additional benefits we would get if they cut additional money from our salaries," he told The Daily Star.

Azizul said it would be quite difficult for the teachers to support their families if more money was cut from their salaries.

For example, he said, a senior teacher gets Tk 22,000 per month and Tk 2,200 would be deducted from her/his salary as per the new decision.

If the decision is upheld, the government will have to introduce a pension scheme enjoyed by the teachers of government educational institutions, he said. "We want the education minister to sit with leaders of all associations and withdraw the decision. Otherwise, we will go for a tougher movement," Azizul said.

NFTE is supposed to hold a press conference today on the decision.

Terming the decision controversial and discriminatory, Abul Bashar Hawlader, president of Bangladesh Teachers Association, said the government had to withdraw it considering the reality. "As the Baishakh allowance, we only get 25 percent of what the teachers of government schools get. Moreover, we did not get the yearly five-percent increment either. This new decision would add insult to the injuries," he said.

The teachers formed human chains in Dhaka, Manikganj and Bogra demanding cancellation of the decision.

Contacted, Principal Shahjahan Alam Saju, general secretary of the non-government teachers and employees' welfare trust, said there were around 45,000 applications pending for retirement benefits and welfare allowances due to a lack of money.

He said as per the rules, when a teacher went into retirement he would get the benefits on the basis of his/her latest scale. Since the teachers' salary was doubled in the last fiscal year, the amount of their retirement benefits also went up, he added.

"Now where would we get the additional money from?" he asked. Moreover, the law on the retirement board and welfare trust does not say anything that the government will have to contribute an equal amount of money to the teachers' retirement fund.

Currently, there are over 28,000 MPO-enlisted non-government schools, colleges, madrasas and technical institutions in the country where around five lakh teachers and employees work.