

PAY SCALE 'DISPARITY'

Teachers meet PM today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will sit today with a delegation of public university teachers agitating over "disparities" in the eighth national pay scale to discuss the ongoing stalemate at the universities.

A 30-member delegation will represent the teachers in the meeting at Gono Bhaban at 4:30pm, said the teachers.

"The Prime Minister's Office has invited us to discuss the matter with the premier tomorrow [today]. We hope an announcement may come from the meeting," Prof ASM Maksud Kamal, secretary general of Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA), told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

The call from the prime minister came at a time when academic activities at all 37 public universities came to a near halt due to an indefinite work stoppage, enforced by the teachers since January 11, for removing "disparities" in the pay scale and also for retaining the selection grade and time scale.

Contacted, Prime Minister's Press Secretary Ehsanul Karim said he has "heard a teacher's delegation has been invited to Gono Bhaban today".

He, however, said that a rice cake festival would be held at Gono Bhaban around 4:30pm today where people from all professions would be present.

FBUTA, a platform of all public university teachers' associations in the country, has repeatedly called for a talk with the prime minister, saying a five-minute talk with her will

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solve the crisis.

They said the strike would be on today too.

Meanwhile, leaders of FBUTA presented the education ministry with a package proposal yesterday, the fifth day of the stoppage. Education Secretary Sohrab Hossain received the proposal as the education minister is currently outside the country.

One of the clauses in the proposal was promotion of professors from grade 3 to grade 2 within five years of their service as professor and a further promotion to grade 1 after a certain period of time, said Prof Nizamul Haque Bhuiyan, a leader of FBUTA.

In the proposal, teachers urged the ministry to keep 25 percent of the professors in grade 1 and providing five percent with the status equivalent to senior secretaries, he told The Daily Star.

"We sat today [yesterday] and finalised our proposal," said Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed, president of FBUTA.

Teachers under the banner of FBUTA have been protesting the eighth pay scale since May last year, saying it downgraded their status. They have been pressing for a four-point charter of demands including formation of a

commission to initiate an independent pay scale for public university teachers.

Other demands include parity of salaries and allowances between senior professors and senior secretaries, and between professors and secretaries; and upgradation of teachers' status in order of precedence.

Meanwhile, a Supreme Court lawyer challenged the legality of the teachers' strike.

In his petition, Eunus Ali Akond appealed to the High Court that the government should take steps to ensure the teachers withdraw the strike.

The SC lawyer also prayed that the HC will direct teachers to attend their classes within 24 hours.

Education is a fundamental right and this strike is depriving the students of their rights, Eunus told The Daily Star, citing the petition.

Eunus also said teachers could have their grievances heard in court if there was any discrimination in their salary and dignity.

But they cannot enforce the strike by boycotting classes and hampering the education of the students, he said, adding that the HC was likely to hear the petition on Monday [today].