

## Early inclusion of non-govt teachers in new pay called for

THE apparent silence of the government about the inclusion of non-government teachers and employees in the new national pay scale has, indeed, reasons to raise questions. The finance minister in his budget proposal announced that the new pay scale, which doubles salaries of government officers and employees, will be in force from July 1. He, however, failed to mention in the speech if non-government teachers and employees would be entitled to the increased pay. Moreover, according to media reports, he even skipped, among others, the issue in his post-budget press conference on Friday. Under the circumstances, meanwhile, Shikhhak Karmachari Jote, an alliance of non-government teachers and employees, as New Age reported on Saturday, demanded an unequivocal and unconditional announcement from the minister over the issue.

Nearly five lakh teachers and employees working at about 28,000 non-government post-primary educational institutions have received what their peers in the public sector monthly get in a basic pay from the public exchequer under the monthly pay order scheme since July 2006. Besides, the Eighth National Pay and Services Commission that submitted its report to the finance minister in December 2014 recommended that those who enjoyed MPO benefits should be entitled to the pay increase six months after the new pay scale was implemented. The pay commission suggested the delay so that, as they argued, the government could properly review the existing MPO system allegedly mired in rampant corruption and irregularities in the meantime. It is pertinent to mention here that non-government teachers have demanded their inclusion in the new pay scale since the institution of the pay commission in November 2013. Additionally, the government repeatedly made announcements about a separate pay scale for teachers just to let them remain rhetoric thus far.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the MPO system was introduced as a compensation for the state's failure, if not unwillingness, to nationalise the institutions concerned, something crucial for ensuring universal education by at least giving relief to students in general and those belonging to the low-income families in particular from excessive cost of education. In addition, the MPO system significantly helped non-government teachers and employees in their struggle to make ends meet. If they remain outside the latest pay coverage, it may further widen the gap between government and non-government teachers, which will create an adverse impact on the academic life of students in rural areas, in particular, having mostly non-government educational institutions. The government can take some more time to allow non-government teachers and employees to enjoy the new pay only after checking if they are at all eligible for the benefit, which is important, especially as far as quality education is concerned. But it in no way allows the government to shelve their inclusion into the new pay scale for an indefinite period, let alone deprive them of it.