

Demo hits education

Public university teachers agitating for higher pay; protests over VAT at private universities

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The ongoing teachers' movement over the new pay scale is disrupting academic activities at public educational institutions, especially at university and college levels.

Teachers yesterday staged fresh protests at several universities over the finance minister's remark on their movement, demanding that AMA Muhith withdraw his remark in 24 hours.

On Tuesday, they held demonstrations all over the country, protesting the "anomalies" in the new scale. Later in the day, speaking to journalists about the movement, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said, "The most educated section of our population has gone for such a movement due to their lack of knowledge."

Teachers of public universities have been pressing a four-point demand since May. Their movement has intensified after the new pay scale was approved on Monday.

Meanwhile, college teachers, also displeased with the eighth pay scale, have decided to observe a daylong stoppage and hold agitation programmes today at all the

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state-run colleges and different departments under the education ministry. BCS General Education Association, a platform for teachers and officials under the education cadre, will organise the programme protesting cancellation of the selection grade and time scale from the new scale.

However, students and guardians have expressed concern over disruption of academic activities. If the movement continued, students feared, they would face a severe session jam as they are still struggling to recover the time lost during the countrywide blockade by the BNP-led alliance in the first three months of the year.

"The government should immediately sit with the teachers and find a solution," said Gazi Morsalin, a parent whose daughter studies at Dhaka University.

"We don't want our children's future to be doomed for politics and movements. We want the prime minister's intervention immediately," he said.

Meanwhile, private university students have been agitating for withdrawal of the 7.5 percent VAT slapped on their tuition fees by the government. There was a clash yesterday between the students of East West University and police at Badda that left at least 35 people injured.

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

On Tuesday, teachers of all 37 public universities, under the banner of Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA), refrained from work in protest at the "discrepancies" in the eighth national pay scale. They said they were expecting a separate pay structure that remained unheeded.

After Muhith remarked on their movement, there was an upsurge of protest.

In a press statement issued yesterday, the FBUTA, terming the minister's remark "discourteous", urged him to withdraw his comment in 24 hours and seek an unconditional apology.

They hoped that the government will sit with them soon to fulfil their demands. If their four-point demand is not met, they will go for nonstop stoppage, they threatened.

Their four-point demand includes formation of an independent pay scale for public university teachers, immediate revision of the 8th national pay scale, and keeping senior professor and senior secretaries at an equal level.

At Jahangirnagar University (JU), Jagannath University and Jatiyo Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Mymensingh, teachers observed daylong stoppages.

The teachers' association of Agriculture University in Mymensingh announced that its members will not attend any class and conduct any test for an indefinite period to realise their demand for a separate pay structure.

The association of Comilla University announced that teachers there will refrain from class, examination and other works for five days till September 13.

Teachers formed human chains at Rajshahi University and Chittagong University, demanding immediate withdrawal of the finance minister's remarks.

Prof Ananda Kumar Saha, president of Rajshahi University Teachers' Association, said, "He [Muhith] must apologise to the university teachers for such a remark."

At the demonstration of Chittagong University, Teachers Association General Secretary Kazi SM Khasrul Alam Quddusi demanded the removal of Muhith from the cabinet for his "dis-

graceful comment".

He said the minister's irresponsible comments resulted from his lack of knowledge about the universities, teachers and academic activities.

SUST TEACHERS

The situation is different at Sylhet Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet.

A section of teachers under the banner of Mahan Muktiuddher Chetonai Udbuddho Shikhok Brindo has been demonstrating there for removal of the university's Vice-Chancellor Prof Aminul Haque Bhuiyan for his alleged role in some irregularities and his alleged misbehaviour with some teachers.

But things worsened when Chhatra League activists allegedly swooped on them on August 30, assaulting several teachers including Prof Yasmeen Haque.

Yesterday, the teachers observed a token hunger strike. They will observe a daylong stoppage today.

COLLEGE TEACHERS

Selim Ullah Khandakar, general secretary of BCS General Education Association, said they will observe the daylong stoppage in all the government colleges protesting exclusion of the selection grade and time scale.

He said, officials of the education cadre usually remain in the same position for a long time, in some cases for 15 to 20 years, and therefore, the selection grade and time scale was a kind of compensation for that.

"Now we are deprived of the opportunity," he said.

PRIMARY TEACHERS

Teachers of government primary schools have been staging protests too.

Primary headmasters said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2013 had announced that the post of public primary school headmaster was upgraded from the third to the second class gazetted officials, but they did not get the salaries commensurate with their promotion.

However, the headmasters were told by the primary ministry in August last year that they would remain in the status of non-gazetted officials.

They protested the move and have been holding different protest programmes since then.

Meanwhile, teachers of newly nationalised primary schools are also staging agitations. They have pressed a 10-point demand including publishing a gazette of the schools and repairing the dilapidated schools.

On September 5, they announced that they would go for tougher protest programmes in front of the office of Upazila Nirbahi Officers across the country from October 1 if their demands were not met.

[Our university correspondents from Jahangirnagar, Rajshahi and Chittagong, and reporters from Mymensingh and Moulvibazar contributed to the report.]