

Teachers stay on streets over pay

No sign for separate pay scale as country observes World Teachers Day today

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A separate pay scale for teachers remains a far cry despite repeated assurances from the government to that end since 2009.

Teachers -- from primary to higher education levels -- believe the separate pay scale, which they have long been demanding, will uplift their condition and contribute to the education sector's development.

Many times in the last four years, they took to the streets to demonstrate for salary hikes, MP-O-lissing of their insinuations and a separate pay scale, but to no avail. They often had to receive rough treatment from law enforcers during agitation for better pay.

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Teachers say the education sector has seen some major changes in recent years, but little has been done towards a separate pay scale. They put the blame on the education ministry officials. They are also sceptical if the government would fulfil the promise now that it is at the end of its tenure. Amid such scepticism, the nation is observing the World Teachers Day today. The ruling Awami League in its decision manifesto declared, "A higher salary scale for teachers will be ensured. A permanent pay commission and a separate service commission will be instituted for teachers."

Information like the number of teachers from primary to university level and teachers' salary structure in neighbouring countries. But we are yet to get complete information," Quazi Fatigue Ahmed, one of the members of the committee, told the Daily Star. He claimed he had made a proposal to set a specific timeframe for implementing a separate pay scale for teachers. Speaking anonymously, another member of the committee said the ministry had to remain too busy with multifarious work and that was why they could not put much emphasis on it. Teachers say bright students with good academic records do not want to take up their careers as teachers because of poor salary and low status. Citing examples of the primary school teachers, they say currently a non-trained assistant teacher monthly earns around Tk

8,000 in total. The basic salary of a non-trained assistant teacher is Tk 4,700, while trained ones get Tk 4,900 per month, they inform. "How can we expect meritorious students to become primary school teachers? Would a university graduate like to be a Class III government employee with such poor salaries?" said Aminul Islam, a teacher of a government primary school in the capital. Educationalists think an attractive pay structure is a must to encourage meritorious students to join this profession. "If we want to attract people to this profession, we have to ensure attractive salary packages. Besides, an attractive salary structure will help ensure quality education," said Prof Siddiqui Rahman, a teacher of the Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University.

Prof Siddiqui, also a member of the Education Policy Formulation Committee, suggested teachers be paid more than other service holders, like those in administration and agriculture to encourage meritorious students to join the profession. "It would not be possible to provide the teachers with salaries similar to that of developed countries considering our financial constraints, but at least teachers' salaries can be increased," he added. Contacted, Education Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury said the present government had increased teachers' salaries and benefits in last four years and the issue of a separate pay scale was also in the offing. "The ministry was working for a separate salary structure for the teachers, but finance is a big issue. We hope to come up with a separate pay scale soon," he expressed the hope.