

# Assistant pry teachers end hunger strike

Minister gives them assurance on upgrading their salary scale

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The assistant primary teachers, who have been observing an indefinite hunger strike over upgrading their salary scale since Saturday, called off the programme yesterday following assurance of measures to meet their demand.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman held a meeting with a delegation of the agitating teachers at his Minto Road house in the afternoon and went to the Central Shaheed Minar around 5:30pm.

The teachers ended their strike by taking water and juice offered by Mostafizur.

"We have suspended our strike after the minister assured us that they will soon start their work to solve our problem. But if our demand is not met within a month, we will go for a fresh hunger strike," Shahinur Al-Amin, one of the leaders

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Assistant pry

FROM PAGE 16

of the movement, told The Daily Star.

After offering the teachers water and juice, the minister announced that the problem would be solved through discussions and the teachers would have to present the rationale of their demand in the discussions. Then he would sit with the higher authorities of the government to solve the problem, he added.

His announcement, however, triggered a furore among a number of teachers who demanded that the minister make a specific declaration regarding their demand from the Shaheed Minar. Mostafizur left the place immediately.

Asked about the stance on this group of teachers, Shahinur said general teachers have been aggrieved over many other issues.

"The teachers' organisation made the decision [calling off of the strike] unanimously. If anybody still wants to continue the agitation, it will be their personal matter."

An hour later, the agitating teachers left the spot.

Under the banner of "Bangladesh Primary Assistant Teachers' Grand Alliance", several thousand assistant teachers of the government primary schools began their strike on Saturday with a one-point demand -- fixing the trained assistant teachers' grade next to the trained head teachers' grade.

There is a three-tier gap between the wage grades of assistant teachers and head teachers. The trained assistant teachers get salary under the 14th grade of the wage board whereas the trained head teachers get salary under the 11th grade.

At least 40 teachers, including some female teachers, fell sick in the last three days and some of them were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said leaders of the alliance.

"It is because of the bureaucratic red tape that created the wage discrimination. We were a step behind the headmasters several years back, but now we're three steps behind the headmasters," said Tapan Kumar Mandal, another leader of the alliance.

"We want an end of this discrimination. We want the government to reduce the wage difference between the teachers."

Leaders of some political parties expressed solidarity with the agitating teachers yesterday.

Since the country's independence till 2005, the difference between the wage grades of assistant teachers and headmasters were only one-tier. But it started to increase afterwards, the teachers said.

And without solving the problem, the Directorate of Primary Education has recently forwarded a proposal made by the Public Service Commission to the primary and mass education ministry for elevating the headmaster's grade to 10, they added.

The agitating teachers said if upgraded to the 11th grade, the basic salary of assistant teachers would increase to Tk 12,500 from Tk 10,200 in the 14th grade.

