

Govt needs to address teacher shortage in secondary schools

EVER since the Awami League-led government assumed office in 2009, its key functionaries, especially the education minister, have persisted with the claim of turning a corner in the education sector. Ironically, however, as mentioned in a New Age report on Saturday, 30,500 out of 210,916 positions for teachers in different secondary educational institutions across the country have remained vacant over years. Moreover, among the positions that are vacant, 1,788 are for head teachers while 112 for section teachers—a position equivalent to that of the head teacher. In other words, hundreds of secondary schools and madrassahs have been conducting their activities without any head teacher for years now.

According to the Bangladesh Government Secondary Assistant Teachers' Association president, as quoted in the report, out of a total of 317 government secondary schools around the country, 117 currently lack head teachers, while about 1,200 out of 9,000 positions for assistant teachers in these schools lie vacant. In such a situation, they need to take twice as many classes as they are supposed to, sometimes of subjects that are not at all linked to their area of specialisation. For instance, there are many government schools where 'a teacher for Bangla needs to take mathematics class'. Given such a dismal situation in government schools that are supposed to be taken care of by the relevant government authorities round the year, one need not be an expert to understand what is going on at least in this regard in the non-government institutions that are mostly located in rural areas and thus fall victim to general apathy of the ruling quarters. It is also important to note that with, among others, meagre salary, teachers working in non-government schools are sometimes forced to look for suitable jobs in other sectors. Hence, a good number of positions for teachers in these institutions either remain vacant for years or get filled by persons lacking adequate qualifications. What is more regrettable, the officials concerned have reportedly sought to wash their hands of the matter by just blaming others for all this. As far as recruitment in government schools is concerned, they blame the lengthy process pursued by the Public Service Commission tasked with the duty. On the other hand, they apparently passed all the responsibilities to recruit teachers in non-government schools on to the governing bodies concerned whereas they have to monitor the functioning of these schools, especially the ones under the monthly pay order scheme of the government.

The incumbents need to realise that, if allowed to continue, the prevailing situation not only undermines their pledge to ensure education for all citizens but also cause an adverse impact on the quality of education, which is already showing a declining trend.