

## Govt needs to actively consider non-govt teachers' demand

BY CALLING off their protests and giving the government 12 days for nationalisation of their services, the non-government primary schoolteachers look to have reposed their faith in the incumbents, to redress their grievances. According to a report front-paged in New Age on Friday, the Bangladesh Non-Government Primary School Teachers' Unity Council, which represents about 96,000 teachers of 24,000 registered non-government primary schools, on called off the protests on Thursday, which had begun on Monday. Twelve days should be enough for the government to make a decision in this regard; after all, the primary and mass education minister on Wednesday assured the protesting teachers of considering their demand in a week. One hopes that the government would make the required allocation in the national budget for the next fiscal year in line with the teachers' demand.

However, the police attack on the protesting teachers on Tuesday as they tried to march towards the Prime Minister's Office, to submit a memorandum, has given rise to a number of unpleasant questions about the government's intent. Here, it is pertinent to recall that the attack left at least 10 teachers injured and one of them, a freedom fighter, succumbed to his injury on Wednesday.

The way the police acted and reacted on Tuesday, the very day that the prime minister incidentally spoke highly of teachers at a rally of government secondary schools in the capital and announced that assistant teachers would be upgraded to class II from class III in the pay scale, put a big question mark over the government's self-professed commitment to teachers' welfare and education, and also its determination to realise the spirit of the war of independence. After all, when a primary schoolteacher, who actively participated in the war of independence, gets fatally injured in police assault for trying to articulate the genuine grievances and legitimate demands of his community, it does not quite attest to the incumbents' commitment to either teachers' welfare and education or the spirit of the war of independence. On the contrary, it tends to only show their intolerance with any expression of displeasure, let alone dissent.

According to the New Age report, an association of the protesting teachers has decided to set up a fund to support the family of the deceased teacher. While it is indeed a praiseworthy initiative, it should have come from the government, not just because the teacher was killed because of police excesses but also because he was a freedom fighter. That is the least the government, whose functionaries literally froth at the mouth in iterating their self-professed commitment to the spirit of the war of independence, is expected to do. Be that as it may, if the government truly believes that, as the prime minister said the other day, teachers are honourable members of society and architects of worthy citizens, it needs to meet their demands and help them lead a life of dignity.