

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Teachers go on strike today over 'pay disparity'

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An indefinite teachers' strike begins at all the public universities today in protest at the "government inaction" on fulfilling their demands, including removal of "discriminatory provisions" in the eighth national pay scale and retaining selection grade and time scale.

No class will be held at any of the institutions and evening courses will also remain closed.

"An indefinite work stoppage will be observed at all the public universities from Monday [today] and it will continue until our demands are met," said a press release of the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers Association (FBUTA).

However, a university on its own will take a decision about holding exams, read the release, signed by FBUTA President Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed and Secretary General Prof ASM Maksud Kamal.

The announcement of the strike created a great deal of uncertainty among students, especially the examinees.

"We are worried as our honour's final exam is scheduled to begin on January 16," said Abu Sayed Konok, a final-year

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student of mechanical engineering dept at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

"Our internship and post graduation will be badly hampered because of the strike."

Freshers have a similar view.

"We do not know when our classes will start," said Noor Alam of Dhaka University anthropology department.

In another development, a press release said doctors, engineers, agriculturist, and officials of the 26th BCS cadres would observe a two-hour (12:00noon to 2:00pm) work stoppage every day. Demanding removal of "discrimination in the pay scale", the programme will begin today and continue till January 17.

On January 2, FBUTA decided to call the indefinite work abstention after holding a meeting with the representatives of all the 37 public universities.

"Our nonstop work stoppage will continue until the government issues a gazette notification removing the discriminatory provisions," FBUTA Secretary General Prof Maksud told The Daily Star.

The finance minister on December 6 had assured them of retaining the selection grade and time scale. But he did not keep his words, he added.

In the existing system, if a public servant does not get promotion in due time he is entitled to get time scale and selection grade.

Prof Maksud added, "There is no scope for the professors to obtain grade 1 like the senior secretaries in the eighth pay scale. Bureaucracy and some anti-government officials of the finance ministry are the main reasons behind this ongoing crisis."

Yesterday, Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA) announced that during the strike they would not hold midterm or any other tests. But course/semester finals will be out of its purview.

"We took this decision at the requests of students," said Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed, who is also the president of DUTA.

On the other hand, teachers of Bangladesh Agricultural University took a harsher decision: they will not take even final exams.

"Teachers are very much agitated because their dignity was hurt in the new pay scale. We have no alternative to a tough movement like the postponement of the final exams," said Abdullah Iqbal, joint secretary of Bangladesh Agricultural University Teacher's Association.

"The authorities concerned should respond properly otherwise our students will plunge into a serious session jam," he said.

Teachers of all the 37 universities have been protesting the 8th pay scale since May, saying it downgraded their status. Since then, they have been pressing for a four-point charter of demands including formation of a commission to initiate an independent pay scale for public university teachers.

The other demands are their parity with senior professors and senior secretaries and between professors and secretaries in salary and allowance; upgrading the status of teachers in the warrant of precedence; and the provision of cars, foreign and government scholarships and other allowances for teachers similar to provisions given to bureaucrats.