

Govt must look into ibtedayi madrassah teachers' demand

IBTEDAYI, or primary, madrassah teachers, who had sat in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka for eight days till Monday, have now been on fast-unto-death and they continued with their programme for the third consecutive day on Thursday, till when at least 74 of them, demanding the nationalisation of all primary madrassahs, fell ill. What is concerning here is the sufferings that the teachers — although 2,500 of them are now on demonstrations, they claim to represent about 50,000 teachers of about 10,000 madrassahs across the country — are now facing to push for their demand for a bit more easy living by way of an increased payment to end their miseries that they have been facing in their daily life for years. Yet no resolution has so far been in sight. The six-point demands that they have been pushing for include, apart from nationalisation, infrastructure for the institutions, salary under the national pay scale and teacher training as primary schoolteachers receive. While some of the demands may be looked into, some other demands including an increased pay, infrastructure and training for ibtedayi madrassah teachers, keeping to what primary schoolteachers receive, are quite justified. The government addressing these issues will not only help the teachers but also the students.

The ibtedayi madrassahs follow the national education curriculum, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board prints the textbooks for them and the primary education ministry holds the ibtedayi terminal examinations. This suggests that the government has control of a sort on the institutions. When the teachers are too poorly paid to run their family, it is the duty of the government to look into the issue. If the nationalisation of the institutions, which can be looked into, is not possible, the government should put in a mechanism so that they are decently paid to run their family and pay for the expenses of their daily chores. The issues of teacher training and adequate infrastructure are more than justified to help a large number of students — about 2,00,000 students take the ibtedayi terminal examinations, equivalent to the Primary School Completion Examinations — to learn in a better way and in a better environment. The primary education scene has always been unplanned in the country. There may be cases where the number of institutions are more than what are needed and there are cases where a small number of institutions offer education for a large number of students beyond the capacity. Ibtedayi madrassahs are no exceptions. And the government should, in such a situation, do a proper survey to assess the needs and chalk up an action plan for gradual betterment of the institutions, if needed, by closing some that are not needed.

The government, under the circumstances, must sit with the ibtedayi teachers on demonstrations, look into their the demands and attend to the issues that are logical and justified. There is no reason for them to suffer, now on fast-unto-death, from the biting cold and from poor pay that they struggle with to run their family. In the process, the government must streamline the primary education scene.