

Govt should iron out retirement benefits of MPO teachers, staff

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THE growing backlog of applications for retirement benefits for teachers and employees of non-government secondary schools, madrassahs and colleges under the monthly pay order scheme is worrying. There have been 83,500 applications pending with two authorities that provide retirement benefits — 44,500 with the Non-Government Teachers and Employees' Retirement Benefits Board and 39,000 with the Welfare Trust. The backlog, which keeps growing with the filing of 1,000 applications on an average with both the authorities every year, is so huge that it takes about four years for the teachers and employees who retire to get the benefits after they file the applications. The member secretary of the Alliance of the Associations of Teachers and Employees under MPO says that the board is now disposing of the applications filed in 2021 and the trust is dealing with the applications filed in 2022. The situation has pushed many retired teachers and employees in utter hardship. Many of the retired teachers and employees have also died before they could get the benefits.

Officials blame the misappropriation of funds for the delay in benefits. The adviser to the chief adviser on education, who was replaced on March 5, said on March 3 that the Tk 70–80 billion of the teachers' benefits funds was misappropriated, noting that the funds were kept in a bank that has no money. The delay has exacerbated after the political changeover in August 2024. The delivery of the benefits stopped in August 2024 as the then secretary to the board went into hiding. The trust's secretary also says that the delivery stopped as there had been no signing authority.

The benefits delivery resumed in January after a gap of five months. This is an example of mismanagement. But the board and the trust are also short of funds. The retirement benefits board's acting member secretary says that the board needs an additional Tk 52.85 billion to dispose of the 44,500 applications that have been pending and it runs short of Tk 4.8 billion every year. The welfare trust's secretary also says that it needs an additional Tk 37 billion to dispose of the 39,000 applications that have been pending. The previous education adviser has said that in all, there has been a backlog of five to six years in the distribution of the benefits and there is the need for more money. There are also allegations of corruption in the process that prolongs the hardship of retired teachers and employees.

Whilst the government should, therefore, immediately attend to the prickly issues, it should also increase the allocation for the retirement benefits of teachers and employees who retire from non-government educational institutions.