

Injustice that hurts MPO teachers, staff the most

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THIS is unacceptable that the government has not adequately addressed the grievances of thousands of teachers and employees of non-government secondary schools, madrassahs and colleges under the monthly pay order scheme regarding their retirement benefits. Despite a February 2024 court order instructing the government to pay the retirement benefits of the teachers and employees six months inside their retirement, the backlog of applications for retirement benefits has only increased. At least 87,000 applications are now pending with two authorities — 39,000 with the Non-Government Teachers and Employees' Welfare Trust and 48,000 applications with the Non-Government Teachers and Employees' Retirement Benefit Board responsible for providing one-time allowances to retired teachers and employees. The backlog, which keeps growing with the filing of about 1,000 applications on an average with both the authorities every month, is so huge that it takes about five to six years for the teachers and employees who retire to get benefits after they file applications. The situation has pushed many retired teachers and employees in utter hardship. Many of them have also died before

they could get the benefits while about 10,000 applicants, now ill, urgently need the funds for treatment.

Allegations of corruption have also surfaced, with some teachers and employees having received retirement benefits early by paying bribes. What is equally shocking is that a large amount of funds, created from the monthly deposit of teachers and employees throughout their service period, has been misappropriated, leaving the authorities ill equipped to distribute retirement benefits early. The planning adviser, also a former education adviser, on March 3 said that Tk 7,000–8,000 crore of teachers' pension had been misappropriated. The situation worsened after the political changeover in August 2024. The distribution of benefits stopped that month 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. Benefits distribution resumed in January after a gap of five months. All this shows a neglect that borders on injustice to a group of people who educate the largest number of students. The government's recent allocation of Tk 2,000 crore for the Retirement Benefits Board for using its interest in every six months for paying benefits to the teachers and employees is a positive but inadequate step. The board needs Tk 6,000–6,500 crore to clear the 48,000 pending applications. The trust also requires allocations to clear its 39,000 pending applications.

The government should, therefore, allocate the required budget to clear all pending applications and fully comply with the court order that mandated the payment of retirement benefits six months inside retirement.