

Primary, secondary schools: Teachers' strike disrupts classes, year-end exams

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Students of Azimpur Government Girls' School and College in Dhaka were sent home yesterday morning as classes and exams were suspended after teachers at government high schools across the country went on an indefinite work abstention to press their four-point demand. Photo: Firoz Ahmed

Annual exams at many government secondary and primary schools were disrupted yesterday as teachers continued their strike despite official directives to complete the tests on schedule.

In the morning, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) issued an order instructing institutions to hold annual, junior scholarship, and other exams on scheduled dates.

A circular signed by DSHE Director Prof Khan Moinuddin Al Mahmud Sohel said those exams were slated for November 20 to December 31. It warned that any negligence or irregularity by those engaged in the examination process would lead to action.

The directive came on a day when government secondary school teachers already declared their work abstention after a two-day sit-in to press home their four-point demand.

The demands include upgrading assistant teachers to grade 9 under the BCS (General Education) cadre, recruitment to vacant posts, settlement of pending promotions and postings, approval of due timescale and selection- grade benefits, and restoration of advance increments withdrawn in 2015.

In Rajshahi, the strike halted educational activities at many schools.

Teachers of Government Promothnath Girls' High School refrained from all duties, suspending classes, and exams for the day.

"We informed students beforehand, so no one faced any inconvenience," said Jamil Ahmed, a mathematics teacher.

Rajshahi Shikkha Board Model School and College, however, held its scheduled tests using its college-level teachers. "Exams for classes 6 to 9 are being held smoothly," said English lecturer Shohan Reza.

Shahidullah Saeed, regional coordinator of the secondary teachers' platform and a teacher at Rajshahi Collegiate School, said 17 of the district's 19 government schools did not conduct exams. "The remaining institutions will join soon. The programme is being followed uniformly across the country."

Similar reports came from Sherpur, Mymensingh, Kushtia, Dhaka, and Chattogram, where teachers at several prominent institutions postponed scheduled tests.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mohammad Omar Faruk, central coordinator of the protesters' platform and a teacher at Government Coronation Secondary Girls' School in Khulna, said, "Most government schools have suspended examinations. Some institutions may have held exams if they did not get our instructions, but the boycott is underway nationwide."

On DSHE's circular, he said, "When schools themselves postponed exams today [Monday], a late-night directive cannot suddenly become effective. The circular only shows the authorities have taken note of our protest."

Guardians expressed frustration over the disruptions of exams.

Sonia Akter, mother of a 4th grader in Narsingdi, said the delays created anxiety among younger students.

Another parent, Shahansha Al Mamun, said his daughter has become reluctant to study due to the uncertainty caused by the strike.

There are around 700 government secondary schools across the country, accommodating more than 5.5 lakh students. Currently, teachers receive salaries under the 10th-grade pay scale, with a starting basic salary of about Tk 16,000.

Meanwhile, government primary school teachers are divided over their demand to elevate the pay scale to grade 11.

A section under the Primary Teachers' Organisation Unity Council resumed classes after a three-day protest and conducted exams yesterday. Another faction -- the Primary Teachers' Demand Implementation Council -- continued boycotting tests.

Teachers suspended all exams at Rongchi Government Primary School in Sunamganj's Madhyanagar.

"This is not against students. We will return once our demands are met," said an assistant teacher, adding that teachers would work to recover learning losses when the situation improves.

The Primary Teachers' Demand Implementation Council said yesterday that its full-day work abstention and exam boycott would continue today.

Currently, there are over 65,000 government primary schools, with over 1 crore students enrolled. The teachers are currently placed in Grade 13, with a starting basic salary of around Tk 11,000.

On Sunday, the Directorate of Primary Education instructed officials to ensure that annual exams are completed smoothly and warned that any failure to conduct the tests properly would lead to action under the existing rules.