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However, for ACTs like Sultanul leaving their assigned institutions was not at all a desirable outcome of three years of dedication and hard work for underprivileged students.

From the very beginning of their job, they were promised by ministry officials that they would be recognised as MPO listed teachers after completing their tenure. Even the job advertisement circulated by the Ministry of Education's Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) states, "The positions will be purely temporary with a possibility to be MPO listed or recruited as regular Subject Teacher."

The promise of this 'possibility' is stated in several places of SEQAEP's operation manual for ACTs published by the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) of the MoE. For instance, on page 20 of the operation manual it is stated in Section 12 titled

*These teachers, who were trained and recognised as "model teachers" by the Ministry of Education (MoE), did not get a single taka as remuneration over the last 13 months. According to the Association of Additional Class Teachers, Bangladesh, these recruits were promised regularisation of their jobs on several occasions by ministry officials.*

'Enlistment of Additional Class Teacher for Each Subject'—"It is expected that all qualified applicants except those who reach the age of retirement will receive certificate from the Non-government Teachers Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA) by 2017." Certification from the NTRCA would enable them to get appointment as a regular subject teacher in their respective institutions.

Again, on page 25, section 36 titled 'Sustainability of ACT Programme' states, "It is expected that positive activities of ACTs and the success of the ACT model will be reflected on the government's Sector Wide Approach Program in 2018. Qualified ACTs can be recruited in their respective institutions as regular subject



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teachers. To maintain sustainability of the programme, activities of the ACTs can be continued even after the programme deadline which will help to transfer the lessons learnt by the fast learner students to the slow learners."

It added that two more steps would be taken to ensure sustainability of the ACT programme. The first step is employing ACTs in accordance with the existing pay scale of the government. This step was justified with the argument that it "would create options for DSHE to include the ACTs into the government's MPO system." It also states, "It is expected that by including the ACTs into the government's MPO system, sustainability of this program will be ensured."

Consequently, in the next step, DSHE was assigned to implement the programme. In section 37 of the manual, where DSHE's roles and responsibilities were described thoroughly, it is stated that DSHE will take necessary steps to include ACTs into the MPO system.

ACTs have repeatedly been given hope of regularisation not just on humanitarian grounds but because of their extraordinary performance. The World Bank, financier of the SEQAEP programme, published an 'Implementation Completion and Results Report' on June 11, 2018 where it evaluated the outcome of the programme. The report states, "The impact evaluation shows that the ACT programme improved the assessment score by as much as nine percent points for mathematics and 10 percent points for English." It further states that the ACT programme will be continued under the new Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP) by retaining the existing ACTs and by recruiting new ACTs on needs and merit under the new programme. The Ministry of Education also boasts of the performance of the ACTs. In its report titled "Epoch-Making Development in Education Sector (2009-2018)" it states that 6,200 additional class teachers conducted 37,20,094 extra classes in english, mathematics and science in disadvantaged secondary level institutions.

Again, we obtained the minutes of an inter-ministerial meeting on service continuation and salary disbursement of ACTs which was held on November 18, 2018. It is stated in the minutes that a confidential report was sent from the

Prime Minister's office recommending regularisation of ACTs or inclusion of ACTs into SEDP or into the MPO system.

Despite all these recognitions and recommendations, no visible step has been taken yet to regularise or renew the contract of ACTs. According to the MoE, ACTs cannot be recruited as regular teachers in non-government schools without having registration from the NTRCA. Again, the age limit to obtain NTRCA registration is 35, which disqualifies some ACTs from obtaining the certification. As a result, the MoE concluded in that meeting that there was no chance to include the ACTs into the MPO system and they recommended to employ them through a special scheme under the SEDP. However, this decision has not yet been implemented either.

Md Sohrab Hossain, senior secretary, MoE states that legal bars and objections from different ministries are delaying the process "Under the new SEDP programme, we shall recruit 12,000 ACTs and resource teachers. We want to include the ACTs under this project to utilise their knowledge and experience. However, the finance division emphasised that the recruitment under SEDP should be open for all and in an open recruitment there is no provision of giving the current ACTs any priority. Again, representatives from the ministry of public administration states that we should follow NTRCA act and the high court rules to recruit ACTs and resource teachers under SEDP. Yet again, there is a legal bar on assimilating manpower of any project that started after 1997 into government's pay scale."

"We are actually facing obstacles from all sides; however, we are still hopeful that we shall be able to include them. But we need time," he adds.

When our educational institutions are plagued by shortage of quality teachers, it is really unfortunate that thousands of qualified, trained model teachers are on hunger strike demanding an opportunity to teach. Our civil servants should realise that such procrastination and complicated recruitment practices have been depriving not only these teachers of their employment rights but also depriving countless school students of quality education.

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**The ACTs have been on hunger strike in front of National Press Club since February 7, 2019.**