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Teachers with no schools to go to

Forced resignations, humiliation of educators by students, mobs risk long-term damage, warn educationists

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

As the world celebrates International Teachers' Day to honour educators and their role in society, teachers in Bangladesh are observing it in a different reality.

Educationists say many have faced humiliation, fear, and forced resignations since the July uprising. With some removed or punished for speaking out, others now hesitate to speak freely in class, putting the teaching-learning process under strain.

They warn the damage may be hard to undo and could have lasting consequences for education and society. They fear the profession's social standing will suffer for years to come.

On September 25, a video from Gauripur upazila in Mymensingh went viral, showing Golam Mohammad, principal of Bhutiar Kona Adarsha High School and College, being forced out of his institution. Anwar Hossain, acting headteacher of a nearby primary school, was seen leading the push.

Golam later alleged the group demanded Tk 50 lakh from him and that he had been denied salary and duties for months. He filed a complaint naming six individuals.

On April 23, Yunus Nabi, headteacher of Narotampur High School in Noakhali's Begumganj upazila, said he was assaulted in his office and his clothes torn just after a court reinstated him.

He had earlier said he was pressured into signing a resignation letter by the school's then governing body president and his associates. Although the authorities did not accept it, he stayed away until the court intervened, only to be attacked again upon return.

According to The Daily Star's count, at least 150 teachers were forced to resign in the months following the July uprising. Education ministry officials said the actual number was far higher — over 2,000 teachers and headteachers forced out across the country, with around 800 seeking court-ordered reinstatements.

The Alliance of Deprived Institution Heads and Teachers estimated that nearly 3,500 teachers across some 2,000 institutions have faced harassment; over 500 were injured or fell ill. Many others were jailed in false cases.

"Of the 3,500, around 1,000 are still not receiving any salary or allowances. The rest may be on payroll, but they haven't entered their classrooms or even their institutions for over a year," said Anwarul Islam Talukder, convener of the alliance. He said the organisation has repeatedly approached the education ministry and the secondary and higher education division, submitting memorandums almost monthly, but seen no progress.

Anwarul, also the principal of Suapur Nannar School and College in Dhamrai, said he was forced to resign shortly after the uprising. He alleged that on August 11 a section of teachers, along with some students, brought allegations of irregularities

degraded."

He added that humiliating a teacher is a serious offence. "If someone is unfit for teaching, they can be removed through proper means — that's a separate issue.

"But when a teacher is targeted for political or other reasons, when students are mobilised to shame them publicly, that is a grave injustice."

On August 25 last year, then education adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud warned that forced removals could collapse the administrative system. He said complaints should be addressed, but no one should be removed without due process.

On January 14 and 22 this year, the education ministry ordered that teachers forced to resign must

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He said teachers were targeted for their views, blamed, and removed under mob pressure.

Prof Mojibur warned that a dangerous precedent has been set. "Teachers can be removed by provoking students and future regimes may use this example. This reflects a breakdown in our state philosophy. Currently, many of our colleagues hesitate to give societal examples in classrooms. The freedom to teach is gone.

"Our teaching-learning process is damaged. The next generation is being deprived."

Former caretaker government adviser and educationist Rasheda K Choudhury echoed the concern. "Teachers were not only assaulted; many of them later had to take to the streets demanding salary, allowances, and dignity."

She described the post-uprising atmosphere as one where harassment became part of the culture, creating a crisis of confidence. "Many are unsure whether they can teach with the same trust and authority in the classroom."

On recovery, she said, "Education must be treated as a priority. Politics and economics dominate, but education and health are being sidelined. In our thinking, policymaking, and budgeting — education has been pushed out.... The only way forward is to restore priority to the education sector."

This newspaper called Education Ministry Secretary Rehana Perven and Director General of Secondary and Higher Education Division Muhammad Azad Khan for comments, but they did not respond.



and demanded his resignation. The managing committee chair warned him not to return, and the next day a group of about 15 people came to his residence in Mirpur and took his resignation by force.

Educationists say the government failed to respond effectively. While written orders urged all parties not to force resignations, enforcement remained weak.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury said, "This is deeply shameful, painful, and harmful. If we cannot honour teachers, if we lack trust in them, and if they are publicly humiliated — then it's not just the individual who suffers, the entire education system is

continue receiving salary and allowances until their cases are resolved. Authorities were instructed to investigate each case and keep salary transfers active through Electronic Funds Transfer.

Prof Mohammad Mojibur Rahman, of Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research, said the crisis reflects a deeper failure of both state and society. "Our perspective on teachers and education has yet to evolve. As a nation, we still fail to recognise the importance of education and those who teach. Some enter teaching not by choice, but from necessity — without the subject knowledge, pedagogical skill, or personal commitment that real teaching demands."

A teacher's final sacrifice

TANGILA TASNIM

On World Teachers' Day, as students honour their mentors with gratitude, one name carries a deeper, more poignant weight: Mahreen Chowdhury.

On July 21, after a training aircraft crashed into Milestone School's Haider Ali building and flames engulfed classrooms, Mahreen didn't run for safety — she ran into the fire to rescue her students.

In the process, she suffered burns that claimed her life. During her final hours at the hospital, she told her husband Mansur Helal, "They are my children too — how could I walk away and leave them behind? Let anything happen to me, but I could never abandon my students in that burning hell."

Mahreen was rushed to the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery with 100 percent burns. When Mansur arrived, he found her body charred beyond recognition.

Still able to whisper, she told him, "You came? I am going to my parents now." She also reminded him that her jewellery could be sold for their children's education.

Her students remained in her thoughts until the end, Mansur told this correspondent at their Uttara home.



Mahreen Chowdhury

Mahreen often told her children that destiny would take its course, but education was non-negotiable. She insisted they study at least up to the master's level. Even on her deathbed, she repeated those words.

She took her final breath around 8:45 that night, leaving behind Mansur and their two children.

"Every day it still feels like she's at home," Mansur said. "Morning in our house meant her presence everywhere — in her habits, her discipline."

By 6:30am she would be feeding birds on the balcony, preparing breakfast and filling lunchboxes. By 7:00am, she was ready for the three-kilometre rickshaw ride to Milestone School, returning home by late afternoon.

After graduating in English from Manarat International University in 2006, she joined Milestone the following year as a teacher of English and Social Studies. She was promoted to coordinator in 2019.

The role meant parents, colleagues and students reached out to her even late at night. At times, she took calls past midnight, offering guidance, encouragement and counselling. One such colleague was Masuka Begum, who often turned to Mahreen in moments of distress. Masuka also died in the tragedy.

"Mahreen would comfort her like an elder sister each time.... Now both of them are gone," Mansur said.

Her elder son, Aayan, 16, is now sitting for O-levels, while her younger son, Adil, 14, is in grade nine. "To them, their mother was not just a guardian, but their friend and constant guide," he added.

Beyond teaching, Mahreen was elected president of Boglagari School and College in Nilphamari's Jaldhaka earlier this year. She had also shared her wish to enter politics, hoping to contribute directly to nation building.

"But before that, she wanted to serve through social and educational work," Mansur said.