

No MPO without bribes

- **Sabbir Newaz, Samakal, 3 July 2022**

First voice: 'sir, I'm telling you- I asked him to pay money. I asked him not to pay less than this.'

Second voice: 'Only asking is not enough. Money must be paid.'

In the recording, the second voice also adds, 'You could have sent me at least half of the money. You are the people of my area; you can pay a little less (than others). Those who enrolled new MPO, everyone paid Tk 7000. You could have sent me at least half of the money.' Second voice further said, 'Nothing works even if you go to prime minister unless taking papers from here.'

This audio was recorded in last January and Samakal got it in the same month. The two parties were negotiating bribery in-exchange of MPO (monthly pay-order), enrolment to government salary structure, for the teachers and staffs of non-government schools and colleges.

The first voice of the record is Rabiul Islam. He is a physical education teacher of Golokpur Hazi Abdul Hafiz School & College in Dharmapasa upazila of Sunamganj district.

The second voice is Abu Taher Md. Kamrul Hasan, secondary education officer of the upazila.

Teachers and staffs of approved non-government schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical educational institutes receive hundred percent basic salary as per national salary scale, Tk 1000 for house rent, and Tk 500 for treatment allowance with their institutional salary. This government portion of salary-allowance of is that much desired MPO. MPO system was first introduced on 1 January of 1980 when it was called TB (Teachers' Benefit). Initially this allowance was fifty percent of basic salary. It was renamed as MPO in 1990s. Later, during the tenure of all the governments, the MPO gradually increased to hundred percent by adding Tk 1500.

Now, 26 thousand educational institutions and 500 thousand teachers and staffs across the country are under MPO. Everyday some teacher or staff of somewhere of the country get retirement and some new get recruitment. According to demand, after every two months, 2,500 teachers and staffs in average enrolled MPO.

In the environment of ubiquitous corruption in the country, it didn't take long to turn happiness of MPO chapter in the lives of non-government teachers and staffs into sadness. They fall in the pressure of bribery from the beginning. The activities of TB or MPO was operated by DSHE (directorate of secondary and higher education) which is called Shikkha Bhaban (Education Building). Due to the allegations of bribery in the process of TB or MPO, the activities were de-centralized on 6 April 2015. Now, 9 regional offices of the country conduct the activities. Reasons behind the de-centralization, government shows, were to minimize the bribe, corruption and oppression. But after 7 years of de-centralization, the condition of the teachers and staffs is like the state of suffocation.

Knowing the distress of many teachers, Samakal finally decided to investigate the issue across the country- bribe oppression is being directed by whom and how. But there is no evidence is ready; the offenders won't admit their offense. So, how will it be proved!

Operation of Samakal to prove the bribery:

Investigation starts earlier this year thinking 'let's see'. In the first phase, 300 teachers and staffs of 50 educational institutions in 23 upazila of 3 districts of the country had been interrogated about the harassment and bribery to get MPO enrolment. After that, 10 more districts had been brought under investigation. It is notified, everybody admits the bribery trying to keep themselves in safe zone. Some people bravely admit their paying the bribe and then request, 'Please don't write my name, brother. It will be my great loss.'

It is worth mentioning the words of a working headmaster of Chandipur Model High School at Pirgacha in Rangpur, Md. Shamsul Alam told Samakal standing on his school premise on 16 January, 'Believe me, everyone must pay bribe. You can't find any teacher goes under MPO without paying bribe. Even you can't find anyone to admit this bitter truth.'

However, it could be reached to some victimized teachers who told their story of bribery announcing their names and the objectivity of their statements were also found. That's why the incidentally found audio record has been mentioned at the beginning of this story as strong evidence where Abu Taher Md. Kamrul Hasan, secondary education officer of Dharmapasa of Sumanganj asks bribe clearly in that record of 3.5 minutes. Rabiul Islam admits the allegation to Samakal at first on last 18 January and secondly on 8 June and said, I discussed with sir about MPO enrolment of colleagues and mine. Sir is from Dinajpur and me from Nilfamari. As me and sir from same area, sir gave me the responsibility to collect bribe from others. However, when contacted over phone on the same day, education officer Abu Taher Md. Kamrul Hasan declined his voice.

Rabiul said in a query, I also paid, but less than others. At first, I paid two thousand Tk. Then I paid one thousand more on second time. Others paid 8 to 10 thousand Tk per head.'

Investigation shows, bribe had to be paid only in Shikkha Bhaban before. Now a candidate has to pay at least in three stages- upazila secondary education office, district education office, and regional deputy director's office (well known as DD office).

In the process, a candidate at first applies to upazila secondary education officer. The officer sends the papers to district education officer after his verification. Then the district officer verifies and sends them to DD office. DD finally verifies them and selects for MPO. Every 15th of odd months, DSHE calls for conference with all regional DDs and finalizes the list for MPO. This is the way a teacher has to go through and pay bribes in three levels.

President of Bangladesh Teachers' Association Md. Nazrul Islam Roni told to Samakal, 'Now bribery trade has been increased more than before. Upazila education officer, district education officer, top officials of regional office, all are making trap to harass the teachers and collect money from them.'

‘Harassment’ is weapon of bribery:

Teachers have to submit 27 to 37 types of papers to get MPO. The number of papers varies depending on the type of teacher and educational institution. If there are more classes and branches in the institutions, more paper is needed. A powerful circle has been formed in the education offices to collect bribes from innocent teachers making the papers as traps. Officials do not take bribes themselves. They make other employee of the office an unwritten 'cashier' to collect bribes. Each of those three offices has such a 'bribe broker'. However, despite having qualifications and having all valid documents, many ordinary teachers have to go around day after day to get MPO just because they don't pay bribe.

For example, after many agitations and struggles, 841 third teachers (teacher number 3 in the seniority list of one subject) received the order of the Education Ministry to join the MPO on 21 September 2021. But not all of them get MPO yet. The Rajshahi regional director of DSHE rejected the MPO application of Rumana Parveen, a lecturer of geography and environmental science of Pabna Chatmohar Women's College, general secretary of the third teachers' movement, twice. Finally, he joined the MPO last May. When asked what Rumana Parveen's problem in the first two times was, Professor Kamal Hossain, Regional Director of Rajshahi, told Samakal on 1st of June, 'Maybe she did not submit all the documents in the first two times. Maybe later did.' Rumana Parveen did not want to open her mouth about this statement when asked if it was true.

Similarly, regional director of Dhaka Prof. Monowar Hossain rejected the application of Alauddin Al Azad, assistant professor of ICT department of Dhaka State College, Mohammadpur, to join the MPO citing 'error in the paper'. Later this teacher was enrolled in the MPO of May.

On 20 February, 34000 teachers were appointed in the non-government schools at a time. Most of them were subjected to extreme harassment while joining MPO. As seen in the list of those teachers who couldn't qualified for first time, most of their papers were withheld due to minor reasons or in many cases irrational reasons.

Again, a teacher named Samia Akter of Mohammadpur Kaderia Alia Kamil Madrasa in the capital was harassed. When contacted, she told Samakal on 6 March, 'I got the job with qualification. Why should I join MPO with bribe? I don't want to take haram (illegal). So, I left the job.'

Hasina Begum was appointed as assistant teacher at Dumki Islamia Fazil Madrasa in Patuakhali. Later, about being harassed for joining the MPO, she said, 'My appointment order came from the NTRCA (Non-government Teacher's Registration and Certification Authority). But they claimed that I was not selected according to the manpower structure policy. The question is, if I was not qualified according to the policy, why did the final recommendation come? Why was the police verification done?'

Recruitment-MPO on fake certificate:

There are examples of teachers not only being recruited with fake certificates, but even joined MPO without passing the NTRCA exam where no way to get recruited unless NTRCA certification.

Md. Taukir Ahmad is an assistant teacher at Nanni High School in Nalitabari Upazila of Sherpur District. He was appointed on 6 February. Then he applied to enroll MPO. But in the meantime, whispering started among his colleagues that Taukir's NTRCA certificate was fake. The teacher's

ongoing MPO process was followed by Samakal since last April after the complaint raised. Taukir was found in Nalitabari on 8 May. He was accompanied by two of his colleagues and a headmaster from Mymensingh. While standing in front of Nanni High School, hiding the identity of journalist, at one stage of the conversation, the fellow headmaster asked, 'What about your MPO?' Taukir said in front of everyone, 'I Poured money in the right track. So, the job will be done.' To the question of how much you are paying, Taukir said frankly, 'I have made a verbal agreement with an employee named Shyamal in the DD office for three lakh taka.'

Despite the allegations of fake certificates, the teacher Taukir Ahmad enrolled MPO on 22 May through Upazila Education Office to the District Education Office to the Mymensingh Regional Deputy Director's office.

When drawing attention to this matter, Sherpur District Education Officer Rezwana told Samakal on 8 June, 'We have to check whether the teacher's certificate is fake or not. NTRCA certificate is now issued from our office. First, we have to check if he has taken the certificate from our office.' And Mymensingh Regional Deputy Director of DSHE Abu Noor Md. Anisul Islam said, 'If NTRCA certified, we no longer need to verify the certificate.'

When contracted introducing as a journalist on 30 May, the assistant teacher of Nanni High School in Nalitabari Taukir Ahmad claims that all his documents are okay. He never bribed anyone.

Investigation shows, two assistant teachers Jahirul Islam (Accounting) and Mahfuza Begum (Social Science) got MPO approval from Mymensingh regional deputy director's office in 2020. The certificates of whose two people are also alleged to be fake.

The matter of teachers Taukir, Zahirul and Mahfuza was brought to check at Sherpur district education officer's office on 30 May. Office assistant Ali Ahmed can recognize the three teachers by looking at the documents. He confirmed to Samakal that these teachers were enrolled in MPO with 'fake' documents.

While questioned about the matter, Jahirul Islam got angry. He questioned back, what did you need in this matter? Those who need to verify, they already did. Getting extremely angry he didn't respond any more query. Mahfuza Begum said, she doesn't know whether the approval of her branch is fake or not. This is the matter of her institution, not her personal.

Office assistant Ali Ahmed and accountant cum clerk Md. Rezwana Ibne Alam along with some other staffs of Sherpur district education office told Samakal, there are some computer and photocopier shops three k.m. far from here located Thanar Mor where fake papers are printed on pad of education ministry during MPO enrolment process. The whole process is done online. It's difficult for us to verify whether the approval right or wrong as we just scan application forms along with other documents and send them online. Rezwana Ibne Alam said, in traditional system of MPO enrolment, they could check and verify the documents. Now, only district education officers can see the e-documents.

Cashier for deal:

An assistant teacher of Fanur Ashraf Alam Multipurpose Dakhil Madrasa at Ishwarganj upazila of Mymensingh district told Samakal, he was not initially agreed to pay bribe. Then he was harassed step by step. His documents were sent to Dhaka education building where he was

subjected to pay bribe. Even though his MPO was not approved. Then he can understand that he has to pay bribe at Mymensingh regional office. Next year he pays 40,000 Tk to the 'cashier' computer operator Shyamal through agreement. After that year, he was enrolled for MPO.

At least 50 teachers of Mymensingh, Tangail, Kishorganj, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Netrokona admit their bribery with Shyamal and programmer Akhtaruzzaman for MPO. None of them willing to publish their names.

When the allegation of 'All MPOs are given with money contract' is presented to Abu Nur Md. Anisul Islam, Mymensingh regional deputy director, he said, 'I don't know if anyone deals with anyone. Why do they deal with Shyamal? He is not responsible for MPO enrolment. Inspector, programmer, and I are responsible for that. Online ID and passwords are preserved to us. How can Shyamoli give MPO enrolment to someone?'

Even after deputy director's claim, investigation shows that in spite of a small computer operator, Shyamal became rich overnight through being 'cashier'. When drawn the attention on this matter, Abu Nur Md. Anisul Islam said, Shyamal's father is a big contractor so far, I know. He deals with millions of dollars. Shyamal is the only son of his father. So, he is rich by born. When asked why a billionaire's son came to work as a clerk, he said, he didn't know.

When asked over phone last month, Raisudding Shyamal said, 'Someone out of jealousy may accuse him of bribery. These are not true at all.' He doesn't want to say more. But the computer operator Akhtaruzzaman's statement was not available as he was not in the office when looking for on 8 and 9 March. Later, after collecting his number from the website of that office, the number was found off.

Two teachers of Pirgacha and Pirganj regions have also accused the driver of Akhtaruzzaman, regional deputy director of Rangpur, Shaheen of bribery. Shaheen took a bribe of Tk 1 lakh from these two teachers for joining the MPO last October.

But Deputy Director Akhtaruzzaman said that he had no driver named Shaheen. His car was driven by Safiqul Alam.

When the two teachers who complained about this were asked again, they both confirmed that they went to that office and gave the money to the driver Shaheen. They also saw Shaheen driving the deputy director's car. Later, several sources the office said the driver Safiqul Alam's nickname is Shaheen.

Monir Hassen, senior assistant of Khulna regional office, works as the 'cashier' of bribes. His assistants are Saiful Islam, programmer, and Anwarul Islam, accountant. Deputy director of that office A S M Abdul Khalek said, he would not take the responsibility of Monir.

A woman teacher of Pearpur Secondary School in Kushtia Sadar told Samakal last April on the condition of anonymity that she paid a bribe of Tk 50,000 to Monir Hossain of Khulna regional office eight months ago.

A journalist of a local daily newspaper in Kushtia and an assistant teacher at a local non-government secondary school said last May that he also bribed Monir with Tk 40,000.

Some teachers and staffs of Pearpur Secondary School of Kushtia Sadar upazila applied for MPO enrolment last March.

Their complaint is that upazila education office demanded 5 thousand taka from everyone. Education officer Fazlul Haque misbehaved with the head teacher not getting money. Later, after the file went from the district office to the deputy director's office in Khulna, the employee Monir Hossain called the head teacher and asked him to meet with Tk 15,000 for per teacher. But Monir failed to take the money due to pressure from a senior official. Later, however, they join MPO.

Two dozen of teachers from 10 districts of Khulna division inform that they were subjected to pay bribes to Monir Hossen. Programmer Saiful Islam and accountant Md. Anwarul Islam of the office are assistants to him.

Helpless confession of Minister-DG:

On the issue of totalitarian bribe culture, Director General of DSHE Professor Nehal Ahmed in a query told Samakal on 8 June that there is no way to deny the reality of the issue. Some evil people are sucking the blood of teachers. Education officers, our lower-class employees are not far behind. And those who give bribe, they do not keep any evidence. That's why administrative action cannot be taken without evidence.

Education Minister Dr. Dipu Moni also admits the increasing harassment of the teachers after de-centralization. She told in a briefing answering a question of journalist, 'We always think de-centralization is better. Most of the cases de-centralization is good option. But in some cases, de-centralization can increase harassment. We think that happens in de-centralization of MPO enrolment.'