

# **The Times of India**

## **Few takers for college principal's post**

KOLKATA: Last year, the school education department had received 22 lakh applications for 37,000 primary teachers' posts in the state. That worked out to 59 candidates per seat.

A year down the line, the government has received just 115 applications for 180 posts of principals in government-sponsored colleges. Worse, only 105 of the 115 applicants are willing to take up the job. The paradox is a microcosm of the higher education scene in Bengal.

The West Bengal College Service Commission, after interviewing the 105 applicants, could select only 80. The number is even lower than last year, when it could select 115.

The apathy hasn't gone unnoticed. Education minister Partha Chatterjee discussed the reluctance among teachers to take up these once-plum posts while responding to a question in the assembly this June. What Chatterjee left unsaid was more significant. Many college governing bodies didn't even send requisitions to the education department to fill up the principal's posts. As many as 24 colleges where teacher-in-charge are running the show did not ask for permanent principals. "It is easy for college governing bodies, which are dominated by political representatives, to influence teachers-in-charge," a college principal said.

If political pressure is one reason for the apathy, the other is economic. The government does not offer too many incentives to lure senior teachers to take up the demanding job.

"A fair amount of experience is required to apply for a college principal's post. A middle-aged candidate, who is already an associate professor, is often reluctant to shoulder the additional burden for a salary difference of only Rs 4,000," a senior higher education official said.

The teacher-in-charge of a prominent north Kolkata college said, "We've been witnessing mayhem in colleges. Rival unions or rival factions of the same party are at war on the campus. They don't even spare the teachers. The administration doesn't provide proper security to teachers and principal. Why would senior teachers with good academic records apply for the principal's post?" she asks.

According to a former principal of a college at Hazra, campus violence in the state has become chronic and predictable. "The clashes are timed with students' union elections and admissions, when student organisations are desperate to get maximum freshers into their fold," he said.

Former Presidency college principal Amal Mukhopadhyay directly blames the ruling party for the campus ruckus. "I have come across many cases where Trinamool heavyweights have intervened in the day-to-day running of the college administration. They want the college principal to oblige them. The college governing body is usually packed with political representatives who get precedence over teachers," Mukhopadhyay said.

He also pointed that many college teachers make a neat sum from the burgeoning private tuition industry.