World Teachers' Day

Let there be a Vow to Attain the Quality of Education Required for 21st Century

by Professor Quazi Faruque Ahmed*

FIFTY million teachers, including the half a million educators of Bangladesh, celebrate "World Teachers' Day" today. To ensure that teachers receive the respect they deserve, UNESCO Director General Mr Federico Mayor proclaimed the "World Teachers' Day" in 1994. October 5 was chosen as the date of celebration in view of the adoption by the ILO and UNESCO of the recommendations concerning the status of teachers on that date in 1966 in Paris at a special intergovernmental conference. The 'Recommendation' was the first International declaration on the rights and obligations of the teachers defining their appropriate status. The adoption came after two decades of exploratory meetings, proposals and worldwide consultations with teachers and intergovernmental organisations. The origin of the Recommendation can be traced as early as 1945 with a request by the delegate of China at the First session of the UNESCO General Conference to "draft and promulgate a World Teachers' Charter which would tend to (i) ensure the material conditions of the teacher, (ii) raise his moral condition, (iii) protect freedom of teaching". In 1947, a preliminary exchange of views on the status of teachers took place at the 10th International Conference on Public Instruction Organized by the International Bureau of Education in Geneva.

As regards the content of the declaration, the Recommendation is still one of the most important international tools for bringing about improvements in teaching profession, as well as development of education. The 145-paragraph document is virtually mandatory reading for any one interested in education.

The Recommendation states, among other things: (a) "Since education is a service of fundamental importance in the general public interest, it should be recognised as a responsibility of state..." (b) "Since education is an essential factor in economic growth, educational planning should form an integral part of total economic and social planning undertaken to improve living conditions." (c) "As the achievement of the aims and objectives of education largely depends on the financial means made available to it, high priority should be given in all countries to setting aside within the national budget an adequate proportion of the national income for the development of education." (d) "In order that teachers may discharge their responsibilities, authorities should establish and regularly use recognised means of consultation with Teachers' Organisation on such matters as educational policy, school organisation and new developments in education service." (e) "Authorities and teachers should recognise the importance of participation of teachers through their organisations and in other ways, in steps designed to improve the quality of education service in educational research and in the development and dissemination of new improved methods." (f) "Teachers should be paid on the basis of salary scales in agreement with the Teachers' Organisations." (g) "Teachers should be protected by social security measures in respect of all the contingencies included in the International Labour Organization Social Security Convention 1952, namely by medical care, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, old age benefit, employment injury benefit, family benefit, maternity benefit, invalidity benefit and survivors" benefit." (h) "All aspects of preparation and employment of teachers should be free from any form of discrimination." (i) Nonetheless "Authorities should recognize that improvement in the social and economic status of teachers, their living and working conditions, their terms of employment and their career prospects are the best means of overcoming any existing shortage of competent and experienced teachers and of attracting to and retaining in the teaching profession substantial number of fully qualified persons."

UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor and the renowned American educationist as well as leader of Educational International (EI) Ms Mary Hatwood Futrell, in a joint article have remarked that the "Guiding Principles of this text (the 'Recommendation') remain as valid today as they did 31 years ago, but countries need to act." They therefore have recommended 5 concrete measures that governments should take to improve teachers' conditions and thereby education :

Give teachers the moral and material recognition they need and deserve, appropriate to their level of qualifications and responsibilities;

Ensure that they have adequate working conditions, including basic tools for their task such as books, papers and pencils;

Pay them a salary comparable to other professions with the same level of qualifications and responsibilities, so that they can live on the salary from their work;

Involve teachers and their professional organizations in the formulation of educational policies;

Provide teachers with good initial teacher education as well as training on-the-job. This will enable them to keep in touch with new developments in their subjects and to improve their teaching methods.

In America, President Bill Clinton has vowed to make education the priority of his second term. In his State of the Union address to Congress, the American President Pledged $ 75 billion to make US schools the best in the world. He called on congress to increase federal spending on education by one-fifth.

During his address, Clinton urged Americans to put aside politics when it comes to children. "education is a critical national security issue for our future, and politics must stop at the school house door," Clinton said.

PER STUDENT (CAPITA) RECURRING : 1997

Type of Institution	Per Student (capita) Cost (Taka)
Govt. Secondary School	2841.00
Non-Govt. Secondary School	698.00
Govt. Madrash	6900.00
Non-Govt. Madrash	979.00
Government College	3785.00
Non-Govt. College	1426.00
Cadet College	47525.00
Teachers Training College	5486.00
University	27022.00

International Commission on Education for the 21st Century headed by Jacques Delors has also stressed in its report to UNESCO: "Improving the quality of education depends on first improving the recruitment, training, social status and conditions of work of teachers; they need the appropriate knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, professional prospects and motivation if they are to meet the expectations placed upon them."

In the Bangladesh context, it is needless to point out that our utterances, and pious wishes are almost completely inconsistent with the actions and the realities that follow. In one hand we feel the urge to bring the best talents or the brightest, meritorious persons in the teaching profession, but on the other hand we do not create the congenial atmosphere for that. Rather we create impediments in the way of even modest, if not ambitious, running of the show in education. Otherwise, where it is imperative that number of teachers should be enhanced in the educational institutions particularly in the non-government sector (wherefrom absolute majority of students receive their education) for ensuring better and quality education in accordance with the teacher-student ratio of the international standard, in practice, the number is on the decrease making the total educational system not only discriminatory but also a total mess. Again while formation of a National Teachers' Recruiting Authority in the non-government sector or new Public Service Commission (PSC) for non-government teachers is the need of the hour, step-motherly attitude is being meted out there depriving the 90 per cent of the pupils of poor Bangladesh who have their education therefrom. As a matter of fact, our words and deeds vary so much, and this is high time that all concerned with education(teachers, guardians, educational planners and national leaders should come forward and echo with Christopher Wulf, the German Educationist, that education is not that cheap a matter to be rated 'as such'. So, a heart-searching is required and to make education productive and meaningful, all our resources and endeavours should be utilized for and engaged in the greatest good of the greatest number. The statistics provided by BANBEIS, an umbrella of the Education Ministry of Bangladesh, vis a vis the per Student (capita) Recurring Cost by Management published in 1998 reveal the glaring disparity and discrimination:

In the backdrop of all these anomalies, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, however, has been able to win the hearts of the depressed teaching community of Bangladesh in the non-government sector by including them in the new national pay scale for which they did not require to resort to industrial action as in the past. But her sincere desire to provide 100 per cent of the initial pay of the national scale to the non-government teachers from the national exchequers, serving in the schools and colleges still remains unfulfilled. Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Associations (BFTA), representing both the government and non-government school and college teachers have already urged upon the government to fulfil Prime Minister's commitment to provide 100 per cent initial pay to the non-government teachers and ensure due promotion to both govt. and non-government teachers. The BFTA has also initiated a campaign and mass awareness programme to eradicate the rampant unfair means in public examinations and for reforming the existing examination system. The Federation again has also asked the govt. to arrange proper subject-wise training for teachers, especially before bringing any change in the syllabus in any subject or discipline.

On "World Teachers' Day" in 1999, teachers in Bangladesh, therefore, vow to attain the quality education required for the 21st century, through achieving socio-economic status and training facilities in their respective fields with a view to imparting better and, as far as possible, updated education to the pupils in better congenial academic atmosphere for them (students). After all, our sons and daughters, studying in the educational institutions, are our bright hopes for accomplishing desired national progress which would ensure appropriate human development. Those are the prerequisites to attain improvement in quality education.

The writer, a Member, Academic Council and Syndicate, National University of Bangladesh is Secretary General, Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Associations (BFTA) and Secretary General, Bangladesh College Teachers' Association (BCTA).

The *Prothom Alo* Pioneers a New Movement

by M Kaykobad

Let us multiply the initiative taken by the Prothom Alo to recognise achievements of students, teachers and researchers alike to develop a healthy atmosphere of competition for excellence. This will encourage the whole nation, having so much of talent, to exploit its merit and potential to the fullest extent to earn the much-cherished success and enter into 21st century with our heads high.

ONE of our eminent scholars once lamented that we do not know how to praise others, how to encourage others. Possibly he realised that encouragement is a necessary ingredient for success, and this is lacking in our culture. The *Prothom Alo* has taken a very commendable initiative in this direction. For the second time this newspaper has organised a reception for students, who achieved distinction in the HSC examination. About three months back they organised a similar reception for the SSC students.

Students from all corners of this country came to attend the function. These excellent students, who have earned distinction of securing the first three positions in different boards and groups, have been given the feeling of how important their role is in the much-cherished development of the country. They have been given a feeling that they are very important in our society.

Words of encouragement and congratulations came from eminent personalities like Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Professor Mozaffar Ahmed and Mr Mahfuz Anam among others. Highlights of the reception included presence and words of appreciation from popular personalities like Jewel Aich, Hanif Shanket, Afzal Hossain and Shuvra Dev. Professor Chowdhury invited students to prepare themselves to break the vicious circle of 'no-progress'. Professor Ahmed suggested to bring as guests those who excelled in these examinations in earlier years to honour them as well for their achievement. Mr Mahfuz Anam mentioned about a reunion of a Hall where as guest of honour were present only those who were political leaders of that hall, and suggested that we should change our attitude, and bring those who excelled in their educational performance.

The *Prothom Alo* was given able support by Standard Chartered Bank, Khulna Power Company and Tulec Computer Education in hosting the reception. In addition to prizes, students were also given five computers. Students as well as their guardians and teachers were introduced to the audience. This will definitely inspire everybody contributing to this achievement of the students. Students of science group showed a keen interest in studying computer science and engineering and specially in CSE Department, BUET. Last time this reception resulted in finding a sponsor for a meritorious but poor student. This time also another sponsor came forward to extend support for Ashikur Rahman — the third place holder in Jessore Board.

This initiative by the *Prothom Alo* must be replicated by others at different levels of our society. This should be institutionalised as early as possible. Encouragement, specially to the youngsters, plays a very important role in their performance. Today we are facing so many problems created by our young students. The whole nation is waiting for an end to it. But our leadership seems to lack in initiating innovative measures to get rid of the undesirable situation. Twenty-six crore population of the USA is supplying students for over 2000 higher educational institutions, whereas in Bangladesh a population of 13 crore is feeding only 40. This itself speaks of the calibre of the students that are studying in our educational institutions. And we are grossly failing to keep these good students on track. We could not so far discover ways to give them better challenges, involve them in right tasks. We failed to divert them, also ourselves, to do the right job. An idle brain is a devil's workshop. If these brilliant students are not kept engaged in desirable activities they will naturally be used in undesirable ways. It is our gross inability to keep them on track.

Motivation and encouragement are too important ingredients of success to do away with. Our fight for freedom is a glowing example of what motivation can turn a people into.

The students who achieved distinction in the HSC examination, at the *Prothom Alo* reception.

This is what leadership achieves for the country through motivating the mass. For many many years this appears to be missing from our country. And the result is very obvious and logical. We are not moving forward. Countries like Malaysia, Vietnam and Korea, that were once in the same state of development, are moving forward with tremendous speed. Our political parties are yet to find a common platform of minimum level required for development.

The whole nation is suffering from leadership crisis in all fields — be it politics, economics, education or commerce. Based upon the progress we have achieved and the trend we are in, it is not unfair to say that in no field have we got a leadership that can motivate us to gain success. In such a crisis initiative of the *Prothom Alo* has really lit a candle of hope through uniting brilliant younger students of the country, and making them feel that the poor distressed nation of ours needs services of their brilliant minds for its ultimate emancipation.

The country is in a crying need of getting the best from its citizens in order to achieve an acceptable level of development. The whole nation should be motivated to exploit its capability to the fullest extent. In order to develop a mechanism of encouragement and motivation, the process should be institutionalised. Consider the case of education. We know it very well that for a country like ours with such a big population there is no way we can follow the path of progress without having education of high quality. In order to encourage quality education we must recognise those who excel in education. Meritorious students can be given reception at district and other levels in order to encourage other students to achieve excellence in addition to those who have already excelled. Students can be encouraged through giving awards to the best sessional/tutorial achiever in each subject, of each department, of each faculty, of each university nationwide thus creating a healthy competition among students to achieve excellence. This may go a long way to divert our students from undesirable indulgence to what they really should do. May be our innovative measures in this direction will play an effective role in keeping our students away from harmful non-academic activities.

The same thing can be done for teachers to divert them from non-academic activities. Teachers at all levels can be recognized for achieving excellence. University teachers can be awarded for their excellence in education and research. There may be intra-university as well as interuniversity interdepartmental competitions for excellence and corresponding recognition. In the United States departments as well as universities are ranked according to their performance. The same thing can be followed in our country, and UGC can be entrusted to performing this job. Universities/departments achieving excellence in academic and research activities may be awarded more fund in recognition of their achievement. This will motivate other universities to improve upon their performance.

There is a general feeling that we are not given adequate research funding. There is no doubt about it. However we must try to perform as best as we can under the severe financial constraints. We must follow the examples of our colleagues who have excelled under these constraints. We are yet to devise a mechanism for evaluation of the quality of our teaching, and research. We must find ways for monitoring and recognizing achievements. These are very important things.

Perhaps our quality of monitoring does speak of our poor achievement in all fields. Teachers achieving excellence in their research should be given leadership in appropriate areas. Research can also be encouraged through making achievement in research a condition for appointment in positions that appear to be lucrative to us.

Fellowships, scholarships and foreign trips can be attached to excellence of research. These and other actions with this objective in mind will definitely motivate us to be involve in research activities allowing less time to get involved in activities that is not appropriate for teachers. This will also improve teachers image among students, which is very important. This will enable us to convince students to follow our guidance.

In this world of internet technology every university should host web pages covering different aspects of the university specially academic and research activities. We can keep lists of publications from each department, which can be accessed by researchers and students of other universities. This will create an environment of cooperation in which our knowledge can be put together much more efficiently, instead of in isolation, to reach the desired goal. This will also motivate all of us to improve upon our performance. This free flow of information will allow us to enter into a healthy competition with other universities and departments. Students and teachers alike may also feel encouraged by achievements of some of the teachers who have excelled in their research activities. This will, in addition, create a good image of ours amongst the academicians in foreign countries.

A healthy and objective competition among departments, universities and research organizations is needed to boost research and other academic activities. We can also encourage applied research to solve practical problems we are facing, through introducing awards for such activities. A different atmosphere needs to be created in academic institutions so that we engage our efforts in solving research problems and not in undesirable non-academic problems we currently engage ourselves in. This will definitely help us complete our academic calendar activities and develop skilled manpower in time. I hope that our educational administrators will give it a thought and will be a little bit more innovative in solving the problems of session jam, politics and arms race in the campus, by diverting students and teachers alike to do jobs they are supposed to be involved in.

Let us multiply the initiative taken by the *Prothom Alo* to recognise achievements of students, teachers and researchers alike to develop a healthy atmosphere of competition for excellence. This will encourage the whole nation, having so much of talent, to exploit its merit and potential to the fullest extent to earn the much-cherished success and enter into 21st century with our heads high.

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The Price of 'History's Most Wicked Crime': $777 Trillion

Slavery depopulated and disrupted Africa, and its effects are still being felt today. Now, belatedly, a movement is growing for the payment of reparations by the countries that perpetrated and benefited from the trade in humans. Gemini News Service examines the demands for compensation, while a conference, on "Slave Routes: The Long Memory", is being held at New York State University, 5-9 October.

Cameron Duodu writes from London

"THE problem of the 20th century," the great African-American thinker, Dr W E B Du Bois, declared in 1903, "is the problem of the colour-line — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." It looks as though "the problem" will be on the agenda of international relations for the 21st century as well.

A group calling itself The African World Reparations and Repatriation Truth Commission, meeting in Accra, has issued a declaration demanding $777 trillion from Western Europe and the Americas, "in reparation for enslaving Africans while colonising the continent".

In "The Accra Declaration", the Commission said it would set up an international team of lawyers from Africa and the Diaspora to pursue all legal means to collect the money.

"All those nations of Western Europe and the Americas and institutions, who participated in, and benefited from the slave trade and colonialism" would be made to pay, the Declaration said.

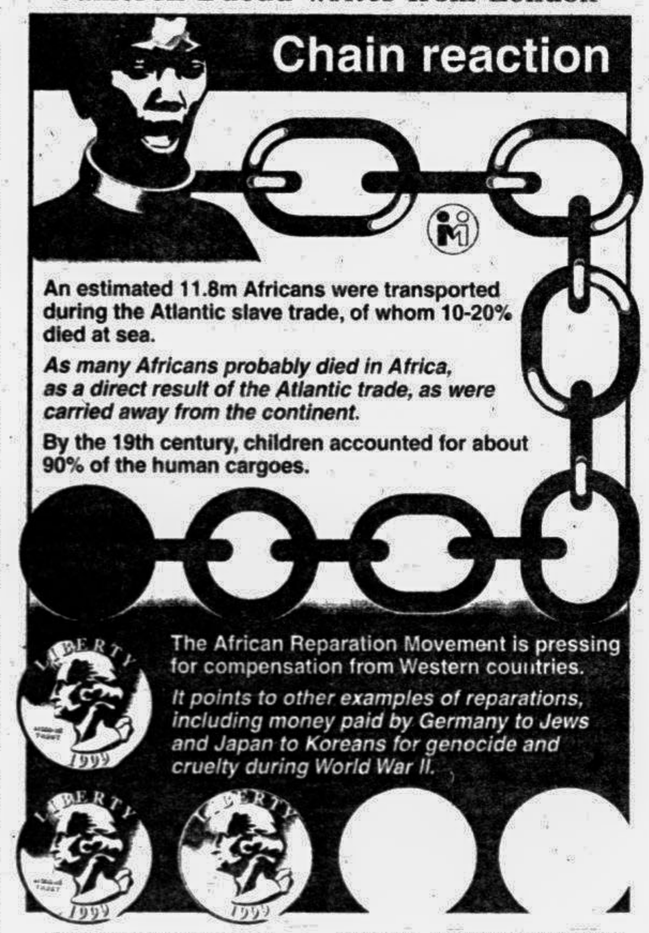
Africa's external debts would be wiped off as part of the reparations package, it added: "The socio-economic deterioration of the global African society today is directly linked to the burdensome African debt crisis, which has strangled development in Africa."

The Declaration followed a conference in Abuja organised by the late Chief Moshood Abiola just before Nigeria's 1993 presidential election, which he won though the military intervened to prevent him taking office. Historians and lawyers at the conference examined practical ways of exacting reparations for slavery and colonialism.

Subsequently, the Organisation of African Unity set up a sub-committee to carry the campaign into the international arena, especially the United Nations.

The debt crisis is not the only legacy of the 400 years of Atlantic slave trade, during which millions of Africans were kidnapped from their own countries and shipped to North America and the Caribbean to slave on cotton, sugar and tobacco plantations owned by European merchants.

Millions never reached their intended destinations at all. Some were thrown overboard when they became sick from the hunger and insanitary conditions they endured during the voyage. Others were killed during insurrections against their captors.



Some threw themselves overboard rather than continue the journey into slavery.

The African societies from which they were wrenched became unimaginably poor as a result of the mass kidnappings. For it was the strongest people — those whom the slavers could rely upon to survive the long and arduous journey and be available for work — who were targeted. As they left, they took their labour, the engine of economic growth, with them.

So as Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean grew rich on the proceeds of "the triangular trade", Africa shrivelled economically. Then, any hope that it could embark on an indigenous route of economic growth became scuppered when a second slavery was thrust upon it — colonisation.

Some of the powers that had become rich from the Atlantic slave-trade — Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Holland and Portugal — sat round a table in Berlin in 1884 and drew lines on a map of Africa.

African societies that had long existed as single units were torn into shreds to re-emerge as the "possessions" of different European powers, under different flags and with different borders.

This is how some African ethnic groups, such as the Somalis, are to be found dispersed across five or even six different "countries".

Much of the instability in the Great Lakes area of Central Africa stems from the diffuse manner in which loyalties to the nation states of the region are distributed. There are Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the Congo Democratic Republic, for example. And Kongo peoples can be found in Angola, the two Congos, Gabon and Cameroon.

Unsurprisingly, dissatisfaction in one country immediately infects its neighbours. Yet these troubles are usually reported in the world press as meaningless outbreaks of atavism, not the predictable consequences of political arrangements arrived at between the colonisers and their chosen political heirs.

It is the frustrations which Africans and people of African descent feel when they observe the current state of the continent that has inspired an examination of the possibility of exacting reparations from the European and American countries that have grown wealthy not only on the backs of African slaves, but also from the proceeds of raw materials extracted cheaply from Africa to feed the industries of the colonisers.

The Accra Declaration's demands are not as impractical as they may appear.

At the Abuja Conference, a white lawyer, Lord Anthony Gifford, who sits in the British House of Lords, endorsed the feasibility of Africa pursuing reparations.

He described "the mass kidnap and enslavement of Africans" during the slave trade as "the most wicked criminal enterprise in recorded human history" and said the crime could be tried in much the same manner as the Nuremberg trials of German Nazis at the end of the Second World War and the more recent trials of human rights abusers at the Human Rights Court in The Hague, Holland.

The author is a Ghanaian playwright and journalist. He now freelances in London.