

NEW PAY SCALES

Handsome is as handsome does!

The Fab Four

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

If it wasn't for the grey skies and the chilly drizzle, I would have thought I'm somewhere in the Middle East. What I see at Covent Garden, London, is a harem of custom made, left hand driven Lamborghinis, Bugatis, Rolls Royces and Ferraris parked, all sporting custom number plates from the Fab Four – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar (ok, there was a fancy Range Rover too – the automobile equivalent of carrying coal to New Castle). And I thought parking in London was a nightmare. Apparently not for the sand birds. The rich not only fly themselves in to London on private jets, but also have their toys flown in to be flaunted around with us *miskeens* of all shades (yes, even the pure bred Brits) gathering around with drooped jaws. Finally, I empathise with the excited village kids in Bangladesh running after the reconditioned Toyota Corolla while being covered with dirt.

London is cool with sheikhs carrying their toys to its shores. London is not so cool with Syrian kids carrying their stuffed toys to its shores. Have to say that back in the day, the rest of the world was quite lenient at taking in Britain's imperial refugees on a really long term basis...

And then little Aylan Kurdi, lying face down on a beach in Turkey, melts the hearts of all (I think). David Cameron, the dad, is moved and steps up to take in more of the distressed. He also hopes to win support to launch attacks on [Syrian] people traffickers. Gee! There goes the only exit route from the Syrian conflict...

Others open up their arms. New Zealand offers to take in 450 Syrian refugees – over three years. Still a handsome number considering it is 450 more than the intake by the Fab Four combined from having been too busy at Covent Garden. Short-sightedness considering the finite life of black gold? Camels to Cadillacs and back to camels, sooner than you think? Quite the contrary. These four countries are far-sighted enough to have not signed the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention, which means a refugee entering these countries would need a visa. Bingo!

But in all fairness, they HAVE contributed to the Syrian cause by heavily financing the war machines there. Well, I did say, a 'cause'...

Meanwhile, the EU faces its acid test on the question of sharing the burden of hosting the tidal wave of refugees. Well, the richer members have accommodated the work force of the less affluent ones on a walk-in basis. Probably not illogical now for the richer, humanitarian states led by Germany and Sweden to ask the others to share the burden of hosting the refugees. Or did you guys (poorer EU members) think that it was all a one way street? Tut, tut! With greater powers, comes greater bills – don't we in Bangladesh know that from electrical power and our recent price hikes? So, Hungary, be nice. Remember 1956, when the world took in 200,000 of your refugees following the Hungarian Revolution, aka, Soviet crackdown?

We are all struggling refugees on this planet stemming from the Forbidden Apple in the Garden of Eden. And there are a whopping 196 countries on this planet, ok, 193 minus Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, where we all, not just the EU, need to accommodate a 'mere' few million. It is not how much one has, but how much one cares. Let us turn our grief into long term planning to solve the problem.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WHEN an author of Oscar Wilde's stature could say, "A cheque is the only argument I recognise," he merely switched from his loyalty to philosophy over to the practicality of being money-wise. What would other mortals then do except follow in his footsteps!

If a politico-administrative process streams into a positive outcome, both the proceedings and the end result are to be greeted, and where necessary, objectively praised and critiqued. The painstaking efforts going into proposing, finalising, and adopting the eight National Pay Commission recommendations have had three milestones: Farashuddin-led Commission took up the job on October 24, 2013, submitted its proposals in late December 2014 and the Cabinet approved for implementation to the extent desired by the government in early September 2015.

There's no point crunching figures along the 20 grades top-down salary structure. You know too well that the salary slabs have been nearly doubled for 6th to 20th grades and those of other grades have been more than doubled. The increase in the first category is 91 percent and in the second 105 percent.

These relate to basic salaries only with even the top notch fetching well below six figures i.e. one lakh only. When allowances and perks are added, the total at the top works out to a fairly large sum of money.

The public officials grumbling over the private sector's market-driven, freely negotiated very high levels of compensation packages, perhaps can take comfort from closing in on the gaps with their private counterparts, though the power factor is the exclusive preserve of government officials.

Two points need to be noted. First, even though the top brass in the private and corporate sectors have big salary packets along with perks, a huge majority of other employees under them draw from peanuts to very modest salaries.

Workers' salary in the garments sector, a cornerstone for sustainable growth in the largest export sector, remains a glaring instance of exploitation.

Secondly, there is a blind spot on the new pay scales. At the entry level, the basic salary is Tk 22,000 per month. Although it may seem a quantum jump from the previous Tk 11,000 when compared with private sector start-up wage, the doubling in the government sector pales into a disincentive in terms of attracting talented and meritorious young men and women.

From where would the money come to pay for the salary bills? The finance minister has set apart 16 percent of the annual budget for this year to the tune of Tk 2.9 trillion and next year the involvement would be 18.59 percent, with 20 percent considered safe for this overhead. If the government doesn't borrow from the banks, a safety-valve from inflation then appears to be

inbuilt. If it doesn't come true, you stumble against a saying by Ambrose Bierce, an American journalist, short story writer and satirist: "A budget is an orderly system for living beyond your means."

The new pay scales do away with efficiency bar, time-scales and selection grades. An official being disliked by his or her supervisory authority would have been forced to stagnate ante-efficiency bar until luck would smile on him at some future date.

The abandoning of time scale and senior selection grade has come under fire for apparently justifiable reasons. These instruments were seen as compensation for those who couldn't be promoted for lack of posts but otherwise would have been entitled to the salary and position of the next higher ranks. Now the compensation comes in the form of 5 percent compounding rate of increase to the salary per year and at that rate the salary of the person concerned would be double in 15 years.

The teachers have taken serious exception to

The economic philosophy behind the new pay slabs is that it will increase purchasing power of 21 lakh recipients, raise domestic demand and consequently increase national productivity. China, Brazil and India have taken the path of galloping development through expansion of domestic markets where the international markets are behaving uncertainly.

The time is considered opportune for pay rise because international commodity prices, particularly that of oil, have been falling. If the benefits of such a drop in prices are passed on to the government functionaries, why would the consumers be at the receiving end of higher utility prices?

As servants of the people and not as their masters, the officials of the Republic are obliged to provide services according to law, free from the clutch of corruption and malpractice. The solvent government officials with other substantial



Teachers demanding a revision of the new pay scale.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

doing away with the time scale and selection grade as higher posts are limited but aspiring incumbents are potentially large in numbers. Note though that university teachers retire at 65 where government servants do so at 59.

Even so, having regard for the high value attached to human resource development in a knowledge-based society, the teachers deserve special treatment. Remember, they contribute signally to the quality of professional graduates and post-graduates we turn out every year. Let there be time scale and selection grade for them; in fact, a special grading system may be introduced towards promoting excellence in research and manpower development in the high categories.

Here's a quote from Henry Brooks Adam, an American historian: "A teacher affects eternity; you can never tell where his influence stops."

benefits in kind like apartment, health insurance, and shareholding in Sonar Bangla Bank being in prospect should live up to the governing philosophy behind the new scales premised on the belief that government officials in general like to be honest, hardworking and dedicated. This is an ideal to work for in a context where postings and promotions are alleged to be auctioned behind the scene.

So, transparency is the credo. What is of paramount importance is to have an administrative reform commission to overhaul the system, root and branch so that it is competent enough to reap demographic dividends by giving the right tools and opportunities to our burgeoning young population.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

A noble profession disgraced

QUAZI MOSIUR RAHMAN

WHILE briefing the media after the cabinet meeting on September 7, an eminent secretary suggested that the government was supposed to consider the maximum benefits of public servants instead of endowing a "particular profession" with greater facilities. His reference seemed to be a blatant and specific jibe at public university teachers. Here, the secretary barely bore in mind that investing on teachers would, to a massive extent, contribute to the greatest welfare of the country as teachers are primarily responsible for creating future leaders in almost every field. Such belittling does not merely exhibit the perception of only one secretary. In fact, many Bangladeshi bureaucrats harbour a similar notion towards teachers.

The prevalent allegations against public university teachers are many. They are supposedly "pawns" in the hands of political parties; they avail their jobs

through lobbying and the meritorious candidates are not always given priority; they rarely contribute to seminal research; they have a yearning toward extra earnings no matter what the source is; they frequently show moral degradation and so on and so forth. Amid these charges, the basic question that arises is whether teachers deserve such tasteless comments or are worthy of the dignity and other facilities reserved for "intellectually active" beings.

At this juncture, the question is, why do teachers become puppets at the hands of political parties which mainly strive to remain in power even at the cost of students' future? It would not be unfair to say that teachers are compelled to negotiate with the nuclei of power which, in a struggling democracy like Bangladesh, are obviously the political parties. Here, institutions barely perform according to proper rule of law. Malgovernance, bribery, corruption are predominant.

Time and again university professors are often subject to public humiliation and physical assault from various quarters. The

latest example can be drawn from the incidents at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST).

University teachers are primarily organic intellectuals who devote themselves to take society forward in the course of creating and disseminating knowledge. That is why, as a general rule, the brightest students and intellectuals choose to be university teachers. On the other hand, bureaucrats, as taken from Gramsci's theory of intellectual ability, are traditional intellectuals who are professional executives and officials of any particular production system of a state. Here, it is of serious concern that teachers are usually pundits, having very little or no coercive power, while bureaucrats exercise great (as per 'constitutional law') power, having little or no contribution to the spectrum of knowledge. Does this not create an awful sense of insecurity in both camps? Interestingly, to trounce this sense of inadequacy, bureaucrats and officers of

law enforcing agencies these days, aspire for PhD degrees, while some teachers work towards acquiring some sort of political backup.


In general, an allegation against teachers is their meagre contribution to seminal research. In this regard, to what extent should people blame teachers for not being able to produce groundbreaking knowledge in Bangladeshi universities and laboratories? Currently, there's a severe crisis of teachers in public universities and colleges of the country. Most teachers, especially in new universities, are overworked. Along with this, there is very little or absolutely no research grants allocated for research purposes. Under the sway of neoliberal education policy, there is also tremendous pressure of the semester system in all disciplines. Assigned with voluminous syllabi, teachers are always in a rush to complete their syllabus on time due to various political and socio-cultural reasons. They rarely enjoy the space and scope to dig deeper into any topic. As teachers' state of

substance is almost always under threat, some of them try to earn a little more by teaching in private universities or offering consultancy services to NGOs. As a whole, new ideas are discouraged or put off, contributing to research sterility in universities.

Ensuring proper facilities for teachers through a separate pay scale and including them in the Warrant of Precedence would certainly help to minimise the perpetual state of crisis in public universities. Uniformity of laws in all public universities can reduce stratification among teachers and staff in different universities. At the same time, political leaders should discourage teachers from blindly serving political parties. Teachers should ideally defend moral standards of society. When they engage in politics, their dubious political practices might diminish their credibility among the general public.

The writer teaches English at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Gopalganj.

QUOTABLE Quote



WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

EDUCATION IS NOT THE FILLING OF A PAIL, BUT THE LIGHTING OF A FIRE.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Angel hair, for example
- 6 Bellhop's rewards
- 10 Pop star John
- 11 Take as one's own
- 13 Snoozed
- 14 Composer Erik
- 15 "Mazel - !"
- 16 Many a time
- 18 Egg layer
- 19 Johnny Depp role
- 22 Auction signal
- 23 Lotion ingredient
- 24 Stone worker
- 27 Forgo frugality
- 28 Margarine
- 29 Look upon
- 30 Johnny Depp role
- 35 - Dhabi
- 36 Skillet
- 37 Memorable time
- 38 Heart part
- 40 Venice sight
- 42 Online messages
- 43 Fill with joy
- 44 Asia's - Sea
- 45 Store events

DOWN

- 1 Nuisances
- 2 Permit
- 3 Canyon of Comics
- 4 Spinning toy
- 5 Justice Scalia
- 6 Delicious
- 7 Lupino of films
- 8 Driving hazard
- 9 Watched secretly
- 12 Looked after
- 17 Nourished
- 20 Down-loadable read
- 21 Become narrower
- 24 California desert
- 25 Crimson Tide's home
- 26 Worldly
- 27 Medium sessions
- 29 Sauna site
- 31 Period of time
- 32 Of the kidneys
- 33 Make a speech
- 34 Cardiff's land
- 39 By way of
- 41 In the style of

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

R	A	P	T	S	N	A	G	
T	A	B	O	O	T	O	R	U
A	V	A	N	T	A	D	M	I
M	I	S	D	E	A	L	A	D
E	N	E	C	B	L	E	N	D
R	E	D	C	A	P	E	A	S
A	G	A	T	E				
C	E	N	T	C	A	D	R	E
A	L	A	S	K	A	N	E	L
R	I	M	A	S	K	S	F	O
O	C	E	A	N	T	A	U	P
B	I	L	L	O	F	T	E	N
T	Y	P	E					

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BEETLE GOT HIS NEW MATTRESS BUT IT'S THE WRONG SIZE PLEASE! DON'T MAKE ME SEND IT BACK!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



EAT, SLEEP, POOP. THAT'S YOUR LIFE, WREN. YOUR LIFE AND DAD'S WEEKENDS. I ALSO SCRATCH.