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**OPINION**

# OUR FUTURE AT STAKE



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Thousands have lived without love, not one without water.  
— W H Auden, poet

**SNAPSHOT**

**MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN**

A few weeks ago, the nation witnessed a shocking incident. Some youths, so called members of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), assaulted some of the most reputed scholars of our country in the premises of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST). They not only assaulted the teachers but claimed with arrogance that it is those professors who started the brawl first.

In most of the public universities of Bangladesh, teachers have been protesting by abandoning all the academic activities. Last week the teachers of all the public universities observed two days in strike. Their demand is very legitimate but unfortunate. The university teachers who are some of the most knowledgeable and respected citizens of the country have been protesting to increase their salary and status.

A protesting teacher says anonymously, "A young lecturer of a public university starts his professional life with a nominal salary which is less than one third of the starting salary provided by any private organisation. It is impossible for us to lead



our life with dignity with such poor pay."

"However, to get this job of mentoring we have to secure the best result in every academic step", he adds. In fact in the recent wage board, salary and status of the teachers have been downgraded four times while salary and status of all other government officials have been upgraded. Previously a senior professor and a government secretary used to get equal

salary and status, however, according to the recent pay scale, not only the professors have got salary-cut but also their all other amenities and allowances have also been cancelled. As a result, the teachers of all the public universities have threatened to continue their strike if government does not accept their demands.

In the last to few years, we had seen

more unpleasant incidents with the teachers in the premises of Dhaka University. In October 5, 2012, thousands of teachers from private institutions, mostly from primary and secondary schools, gathered at the compound of Shahid Minar and Shahbagh with a demand to include their salary in government's monthly pay order (MPO). Riot police hurled tear shells, hot water cannon and pepper sprays indiscriminately at the peaceful sit in of the teachers, many of whom were senior citizens and women.

The government successfully silenced the movement of the teachers at that time by sending many of them to the hospitals with serious injuries. However, following the protest of university teachers, those teachers have also threatened to re-launch their protest from the next month. Their warning is also quite similar; if the government does not accept their terms and conditions, they will postpone all the classes and exams.

Recently government has imposed a 7.5 percent VAT on higher education in all the private universities. Agitated students and teachers staged continuous protest but nobody from the government paid any heed. On the other hand, salary and status of the public university teachers have been downgraded four times than their previous salary and status. In the streets and even in their own university campuses the teachers are being harassed and assaulted by thugs patronized by the ruling political leaders or by the law enforcers.

It seems that our government has been trying to muzzle the development of our entire education sector. However, our political leaders should keep in mind that it is the hard work of our teachers and efficiency of our meritorious students which keeps the nation ultimately alive and running. If the government continues to neglect our education sector, the lifeline of our nation, we have to pay the price in future. ■

## MAILBOX

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### Rotting Behind Bars

Thanks to the Star Weekend for publishing such an investigative story (published on September 4, 2015). I felt appalled when I read about the abject condition of the prisons. It is no less than a humanitarian crisis. Some people are making quick bucks by providing basic needs at high cost to the prisoners as prison authority has no intention to take care of the prisoner's needs. Even the jail guards have made themselves criminals by serving narcotics to the prisoners. Prisons are made to transform the convicts, not to make them more crime prone. One will surely be baffled witnessing such level of corruption. Aren't these prisons representing our society?

Joyonto Mukharjee  
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### Living in Denial

I would like to thank – the *Star weekend* – for bringing one of the most burning issues of our society into lights (published on August 28, 2015). It's certainly annoying when a group of transgender people suddenly barge in front of us, demanding money. They are regarded as, "the mistake of nature" but they are human beings too. Despite the fact that Bangladesh has officially recognised transgender as a separate gender, there are many more factors the government must look into. Government should create employment for these unfortunate people. NGOs and other private sector organisations should also come forward. Their dignity must be acknowledged by all of us. After all, they have all the constitutional rights as we do, right to vote, right to pay tax and right to lead a proper and dignified life.

Muhtashim Uddin Ahmed  
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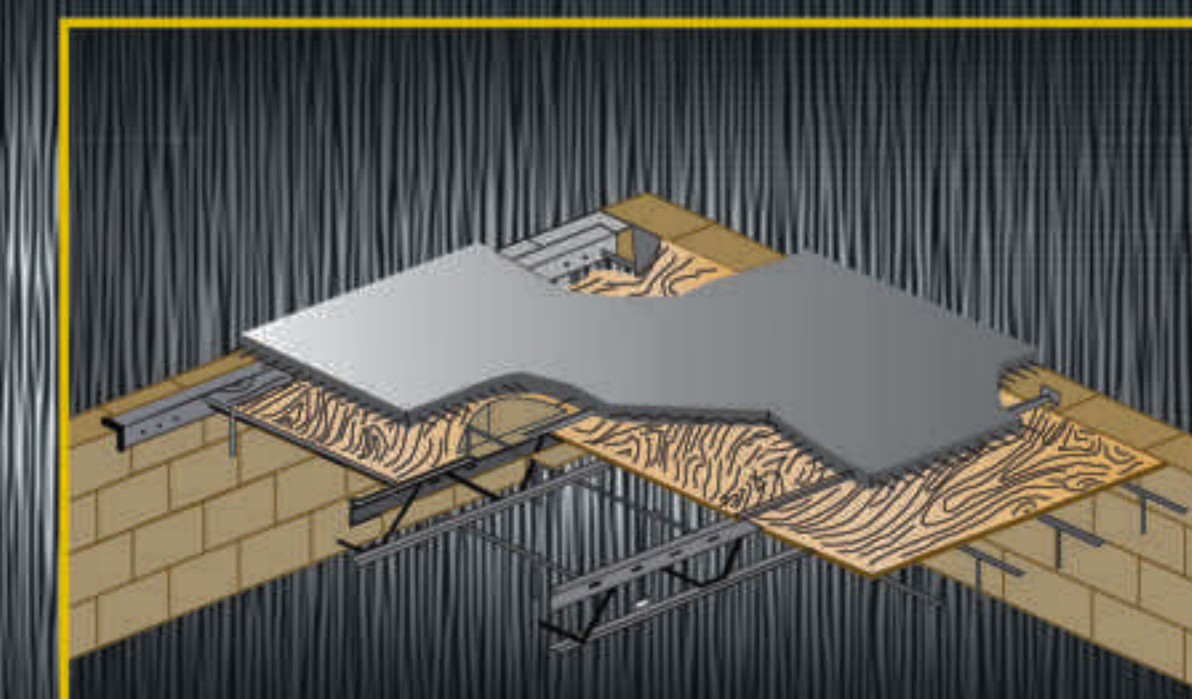
### The Era of Armchair Activism

The younger generation is the heart of a country. It is evident that a large part of our youth is engaged in online social media such as facebook and Twitter. Certainly these sites have many positive sides but these online social media have turned our youngsters into arm-chair activists. To protest any kind of injustice in the society, our young generation now prefers creating storm in the Facebook or Twitter to taking part in the field activities. We should realise that to solve our social problems we must reach out to our people in person. Online activism is important but not at all enough to make an impact in our society.

Bipul K Debnath  
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