

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' MOVEMENT

Find pragmatic solutions

DR. AJM SHAFIUL ALAM BHUIYAN

PUBLIC university teachers have recently generated some heat in an otherwise banal socio-political scene through their movement against the eighth national pay scale. What are their concerns? Do they want extra benefits?

The government has recently declared the eighth pay scale, raising the salary of public sector employees by 80 to 100 percent. Instead of being happy, public university teachers are upset. The eighth pay scale has 20-plus-two salary grades while the previous pay scale had 20 salary grades with a provision for allowances for the cabinet secretary and the principal secretary. There was no category called senior secretary. But on top of the regular grades, the eighth pay scale has two super-grades - one for the cabinet secretary/principal secretary/chiefs of the armed forces, and the other for senior secretaries. It also deleted the provisions for the salary grade called selection grade, and time scale for government employees. Only one fourth of the senior professors can avail this grade. To qualify for the selection grade, a university teacher has to serve at least five years as a professor. For example, a teacher at Dhaka University qualifies for the selection grade after serving 14 years as a professor. It is yet to be certain whether public universities will have the selection grade or not.

If universities continue to have the selection grade, the professors in the selection grade will draw salaries in the first grade. If the selection grade is omitted, the professors of the universities will remain in the fifth grade of the 22-grade pay scale.

But in all the previous pay scales, the pro-



fessors in the selection grade drew salaries in the top grade along with the secretaries serving the bureaucracy. The creation of the two super grades in the new pay scale will allow the secretaries to surpass university professors in the salary structure. New entrants at both the bureaucracy and universities will begin at the same grade but only the members of the bureaucracy will have opportunities to end their careers at a higher grade than the teachers. Moreover, mid-level and senior bureaucrats receive many benefits, including chauffeur driven cars and car maintenance allowance, which a university teacher cannot even dream of. In recent years, young faculty members at universities are deprived of foreign

study scholarships coming through government channels because these are obtained by early career bureaucrats. It cannot be denied that bureaucrats need professional and skills training to enhance their efficiency, but their efforts to seek additional academic degrees are hardly justifiable. While the university teachers are primarily on their own in terms of financing when it comes to pursuing higher degrees, early career bureaucrats have scholarships or handsome stipends available for pursuing Master's and PhD degrees. University teachers are also required to do research without any funds. Finally, university professors have humiliating positions in the warrant of precedence of the state. The vice-

chancellor of a public university is placed on the 17th position while the professors are on the 22nd position. A secretary, having the same salary grade as a professor, is placed on the 16th position. All these discrepancies have infuriated teachers across public universities.

If these issues are not duly addressed, there will be serious academic and political consequences. Outstanding students will be demotivated to take up university teaching as their profession. No country can achieve sustainable socio-economic development by ignoring teachers and the education sector.

The discrepancy in the pay scale can be solved through adjustments. The selection

grade professors can be placed on the same grade as senior secretaries while senior professors may be placed on grade one with secretaries; new professors can be placed on the third grade. Every professor should have the opportunity to climb up to the top grade of the pay scale by fulfilling certain criteria. Other teaching positions such as Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, and Lecturer, may be upgraded corresponding to the professors' positions. In many countries including India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, university professors earn way more than bureaucrats. This has been done either through the formulation of separate pay structures for university teachers or by giving special allowances.

A separate pay-scale for the university teachers is a better way to address the concerns of the teachers because teachers' job responsibilities are different from those of government employees. A separate pay scale can have provisions for academic and research allowances without affecting other employees. School and college teachers may be included in this pay scale in different categories of teachers. Finally, the warrant of precedence should be revised by upgrading the position of professors.

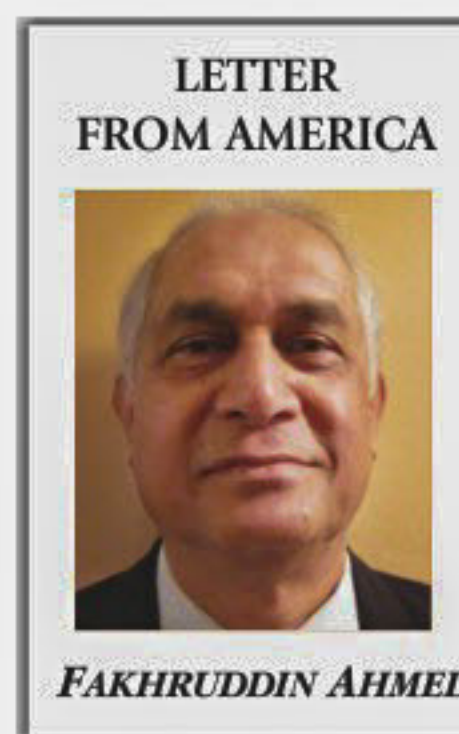
The government has recently reconstituted the committee which will address salary discrimination caused by the pay scale to review the concerns of university teachers. This committee should begin discussions with the teachers without any delay to maintain a peaceful atmosphere at universities.

It is also time for university teachers to be self-reflective of their teaching and research to improve the standard of their education institutes.

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How 14-year-old Ahmed Mohamed's arrest backfired!

Being placed in handcuffs and detained without the presence of a lawyer or his parents is an abuse of his human rights. To add insult to injury, he was suspended for an additional three days from his school - again without cause. Would a white kid have suffered such ignominy?



FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

UP until September 14, fourteen year-old Ahmed Mohamed was an unknown teenager starting his freshman year at MacArthur High School in Irving, Texas, in suburban Dallas. Within three days, Ahmed became an international celebrity! Ahmed was invited by President Obama to visit the White House;

Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg invited Ahmed to meet with him, as did leaders of Google, Twitter, NASA and a professor from MIT, the college Ahmed hopes to attend.

It all started so innocently. Ahmed Mohamed is a geek; robotics and electronics are his passion. He builds gadgets, repairs computers and makes his own radio. Ahmed assembled an electronic clock in about 20 minutes before bedtime on Sunday: a circuit board and power supply wired to a digital display, all strapped inside a case with a tiger hologram on the front. He showed it to his engineering teacher first thing Monday morning who said, "That's really nice," but warned Ahmed: "I would advise you not to show any other teachers."

Ahmed kept the clock in his backpack in his English class, but when the clock beeped at the top of the hour, the teacher wanted to see it. "It looks like a bomb!" she said.

The teacher kept the clock, and the principal and a police officer pulled Ahmed out of sixth period, into an interrogation room where four other police officers waited. Ahmed said that an officer he had never seen before remarked, "Yup. That's who I thought it was."

Ahmed suddenly felt conscious of his brown skin and his Muslim name - Ahmed Mohamed (his parents are from Somalia). The police interrogated him for 90 minutes, searched his belongings and questioned his intentions. The principal threatened to expel him if he did not give a written statement. "So you tried to make a bomb?" one officer asked. Ahmed replied, "I was trying to

make a clock." "It looks like a movie bomb to me," the officer shot back. They accused him of making a "hoax bomb."

Police arrested Ahmed and led him out of school at about 3 p.m., his hands cuffed behind him and an officer holding each arm. A few students gaped in the halls. Ahmed remembers the shocked expression of his student counsellor "who knows I'm a good boy." Ahmed was spared the inside of a cell. The police sent him out of the juvenile detention center to meet his parents shortly after taking his fingerprints. The principal suspended Ahmed for three days.

The logical course of action should have been for the principal to summon the engineering teacher and ask him to explain if the clock posed any danger. He did not.

It is illegal for the police to interrogate a minor in the absence of his parents. If the police really thought Ahmed had made a bomb, they would have called in the bomb squad. The police did not charge Ahmed with any crime. Neither the principal nor the police have apologised to Ahmed.

The picture of the wiry, handcuffed teenager, wearing a quizzical expression on his face that reads, "What have I done?" went viral. Supporters started a Twitter campaign with the #StandWithAhmed hashtag. Within two days there were over a million tweets from all over the world in support of Ahmed.

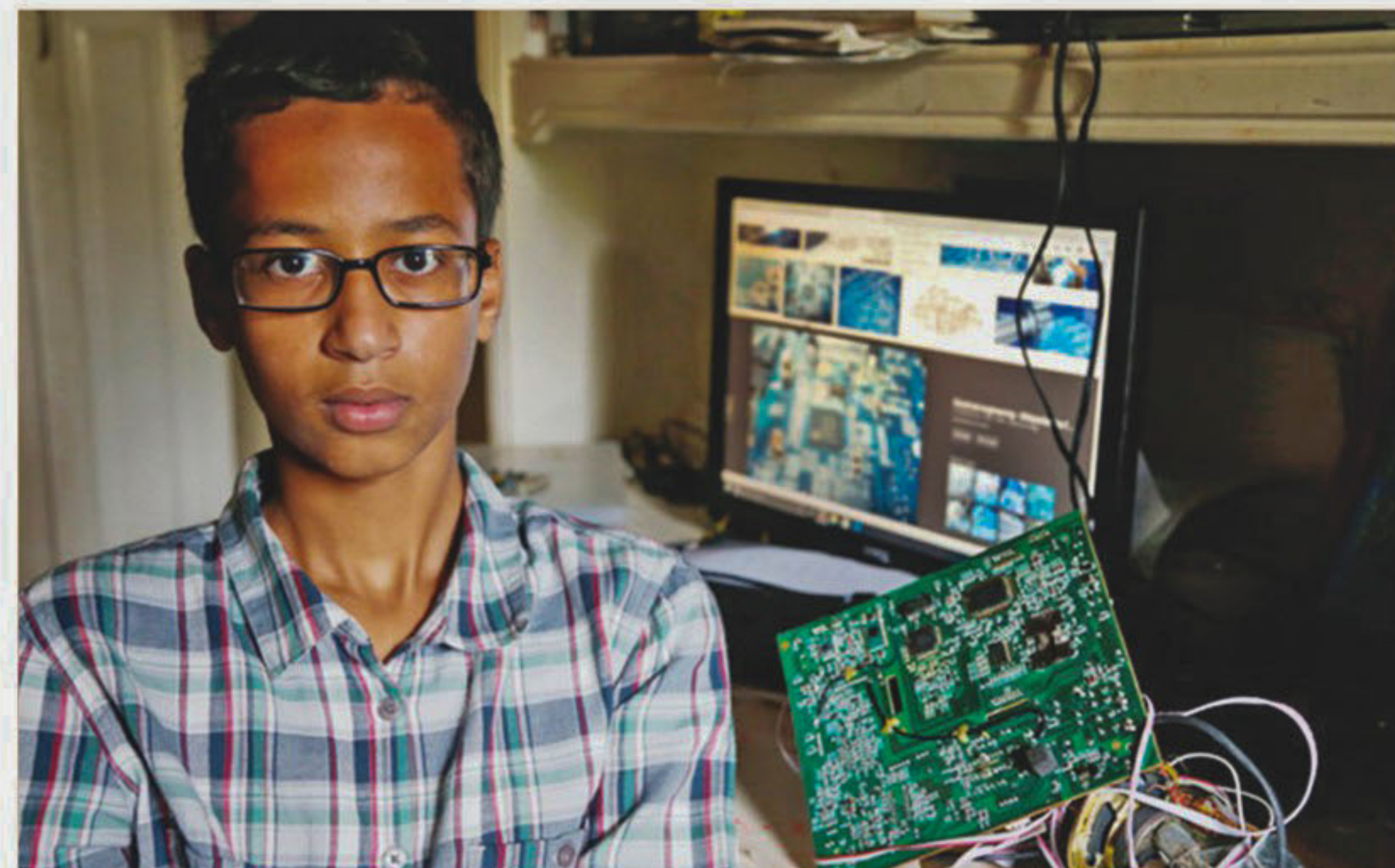
President Obama tweeted: "Cool clock, Ahmed. Want to bring it to the White House? We should inspire more kids like you to like science. It's what makes America great."

Facebook's founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg sent two tweets: "Having the skill and ambition to build something cool should lead to applause, not arrest. The future belongs to people like Ahmed. Ahmed, if you ever want to come by Facebook, I'd love to meet you. Keep building."

Google Science Fair tweeted: "Hey Ahmed- we're saving a seat for you at this weekend's Google Science Fair...want to come? Bring your clock!"

Twitter itself tweeted: "Would you consider interning with us? We'd love it — DM us!"

Hillary Clinton's tweet read: "Assumptions and fear don't keep us safe—they hold us back. Ahmed, stay curious and keep building."



Republican politicians had nothing to say about Ahmed's ordeal.

For Ahmed, who wants to be an engineer, the most gratifying comment came from a Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), his "dream school." During a live interview on MSNBC on Wednesday, September 16, Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, an astrophysics professor at MIT, surprised the 14-year-old by inviting him to go on a tour of MIT and Harvard University. Professor Prescod-Weinstein said, "You are the kind of student we want at places like MIT and Harvard. You are my ideal student. A creative, independent thinker like you is the kind of person who should become a physicist."

It is perfectly reasonable to be suspicious of a device and to have it checked out. It is, however, not all right to handcuff a minor, lead him through the school in front of his fellow pupils and then arrest, detain and interrogate him in the absence of an attorney or his parents. Being placed in handcuffs and detained without the presence of a lawyer or his parents is an abuse of his human

rights. To add insult to injury, he was suspended for an additional three days from his school - again without cause. Would a white kid have suffered such ignominy?

The villain in this story is the school's principal, who sent an asinine letter to the parents basking in the glory of having "thwarted" a terrorist attack! He reminded the parents to review the Student's Code of Conduct. Nowhere in the code does it say that a student cannot bring a clock to school. While the rest of America and the world sees in Ahmed a geek, a nerd and a prodigy, the principal and the English teacher saw in Ahmed an Arab-looking Muslim terrorist! In the process, they revealed not only their innate Islamophobia, but also their complete ignorance of science and engineering.

Since the principal refused to rescind his three-day suspension, Ahmed has decided to leave that school and enroll at a private school.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

A WORD A DAY

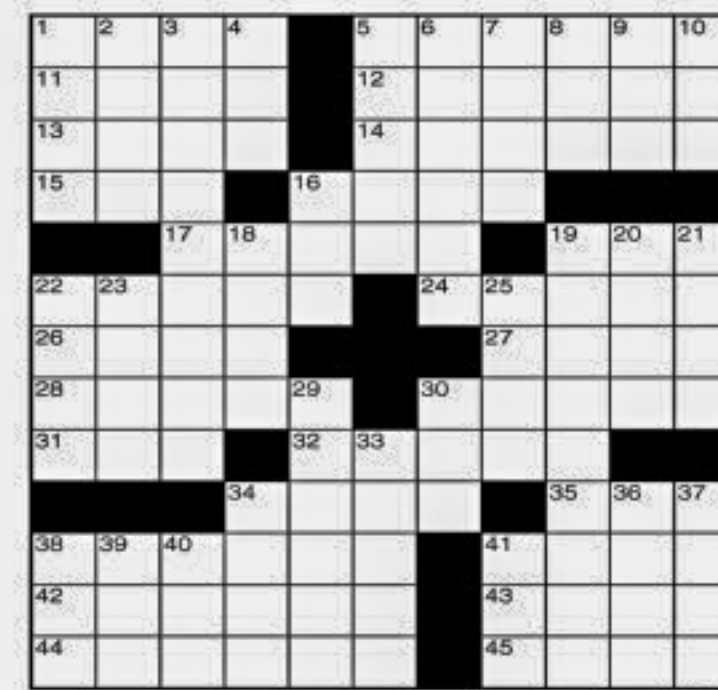


MEL-LIF-LU-OUS
[mə'lɪf'lu:əs/]

(of a voice or words) sweet or musical; pleasant to hear.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Canyon sound
 - Course unit
 - Menageries
 - Horse-related
 - One-sided victory
 - Kermit, for one
 - Braying beast
 - Fluffy wraps
 - Happening
 - Boater or bowler
 - Bent downward
 - Historic period
 - Related
 - Certain something
 - River vessels
 - Out of bed
 - Pupil's place
 - Radiate
 - Cow's home
 - Stir-fry pan
 - Oatmeal's cousin
 - Rock's Hendrix
 - Bureau
 - Fathom or furlong
 - Rope loops
 - Obtains
- DOWN**
- Poet Pound
 - Dove calls
 - Laura Petrie, for one
 - East, in Germany
 - Cleaner scent
 - Consider the same
 - Eats in the evening
 - Tentative taste
 - Start of a count
 - Tennis need
 - Nap site
 - Let off steam
 - You can buy it by the glass
 - Field measure
 - Compared with
 - Naked
 - Approve
 - Forked over
 - Spooky gathering
 - Mai-tai base
 - Inside pictures
 - Fish features
 - Leave out
 - Young foxes
 - Summer cooler
 - In the past
 - Early auto
 - Moon-shine holder



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

