

# THE 21ST CENTURY TEACHER

MANZOOR AHMED

**W**ORLD Teachers' Day, held annually on October 5 since 1994, celebrates teachers and their role in meeting the needs of future generations. The Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), collaborating with teachers' organisations, has planned nationwide activities for the day. The theme this year is "teaching for sustainable development", in keeping with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) proclaimed by the United Nations in September.

Teachers and their institutions are caught in turmoil in Bangladesh. Teachers at all levels, from primary schools to universities, are engaged these days in work stoppage, rallies and other protest actions. They seem to regard these steps as the only way to draw the attention of policymakers to their plight and problems in the education system.

George Bernard Shaw, in his satirical play *Man and Superman*, had a character declare, "He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches." Arguably, Shaw's tongue-in-cheek observation is close to the contemporary reality in many developing countries.

Teaching, unfortunately, is the last occupational choice for college graduates in Bangladesh. It is doubtful that many parents today would wish their children to grow up to become a primary or secondary school teacher. In contrast, teaching is one of the highest paid occupations for university graduates in Germany, Korea, Switzerland, Spain and Singapore, and a coveted profession in most OECD countries.

An average primary teacher's family income in Bangladesh is significantly below the poverty line if the teacher has to look after a four-member family with her/his salary. It is not surprising that countries in South Asia, including Bangladesh, do not even participate in international assessments such as PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment) to measure basic competence of a 15-year-old in subjects like Language, Math and Science.

Remuneration and incentives are not the sole determinants of a teacher's performance

and a student's learning outcome, but these have to be key considerations in national educational development planning.

Few will disagree with the premise that a major obstacle to achieving quality with equity in the education system, as envisaged in Education Policy 2010, is professional and personal capabilities and attributes of teachers.

A vicious cycle, of teachers with limited capability and poor motivation producing students from primary and secondary schools

suggests possibilities from which we must learn.

A national teacher development initiative, with at least a 10-year perspective, has to be initiated. This will include several key elements related to professional preparation of would-be teachers, creating the conditions for enforcing quality standards in teachers' preparation and working conditions, attracting capable young people into teaching, and ensuring that they are valued and supported to perform their job

field of employment for college graduates.

Education as a discipline can be introduced in selected degree colleges under the National University, by working out the academic programme and syllabus, faculty qualifications and degree requirements. Students will receive a BA or BSc degree depending on the combination of other subjects taken along with Education as the core subject. Students fulfilling specified requirements will receive a teaching certificate or diploma, along with the degree, as is the

cadre of teachers who, in a few years, will create a nucleus of quality education personnel in our schools and bring about a qualitative change in teaching and learning.

In the face of competition for entry into reputed degree colleges, the prospect of a general degree and some incentives (stipends) will attract good students to the Education course, even if they have to sign a five-year bond to serve as a teacher. Induction into the NTSC would be an added attraction.

The hidden agenda is that after serving as a teacher for five years, and because of the attraction of the NTSC, many young people will continue in the teaching profession.

Other than qualified graduates of the new undergraduate course of Education, current teachers with outstanding performance and qualifications meeting set criteria could also be inducted into the NTSC.

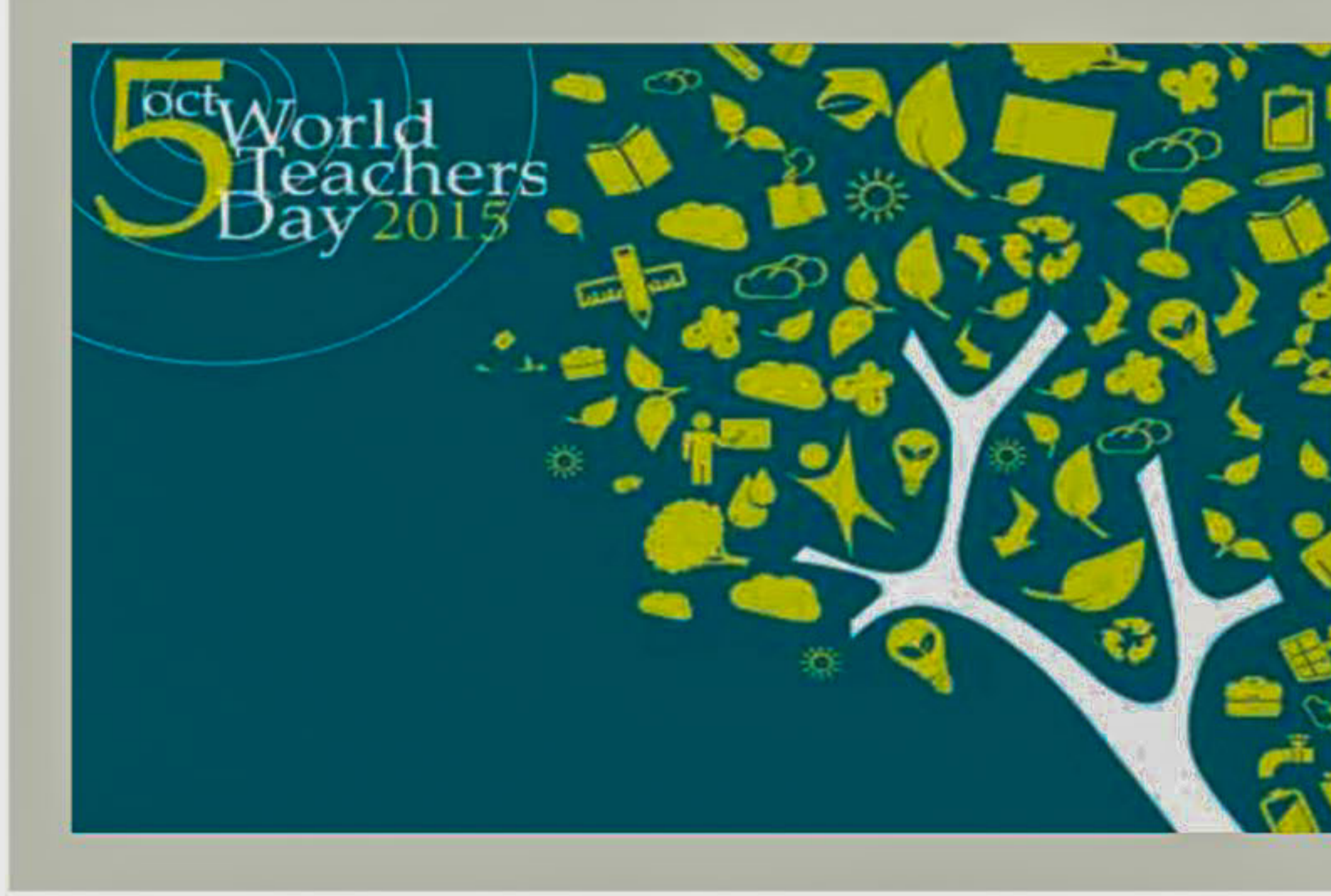
The Education undergraduate course could be started on a trial basis in ten degree colleges and in phases extended to one or two degree colleges in every district. A beneficial fallout of this initiative, if properly implemented, would be to show the way for a qualitative change in undergraduate Education programme of the National University.

This initiative calls for out-of-the-box thinking. It has the chance of succeeding only with high level interest and commitment of the policymakers. The development and trial may attract donor support, but ultimately its effective implementation, replication, and sustainability will depend on policy support and the willingness to commit regular resources from the education budget.

The proposed 10-year plan is not a substitute for addressing several immediate concerns which agitate teachers and impede school performance. These concerns must be handled with sensitivity and goodwill by both policymakers and teacher organisations.

It is said that a teacher is like a candle – it consumes itself to light the way for others. The candle must be kept alight.

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*Unlike many countries, Bangladesh does not have a pre-service teacher education programme, although school teaching is the single largest field of employment for college graduates.*

who are ill-prepared for higher education, is at work. They in turn become low-capability teachers, thus repeating the cycle. A way has to be found to break this cycle and attract the "best and the brightest" of young people into teaching and retain them in the profession.

This is a daunting task and there is no quick-fix. But a beginning has to be made to initiate change so that we do not have the same discussion ten years from now. Global experience of addressing this challenge

effectively. The development and implementation of the inter-connected components will require various key measures.

A pre-service teacher preparation programme should be incorporated into the undergraduate degree programme with education as a subject. Unlike many countries, Bangladesh does not have a pre-service teacher education programme, although school teaching is the single largest

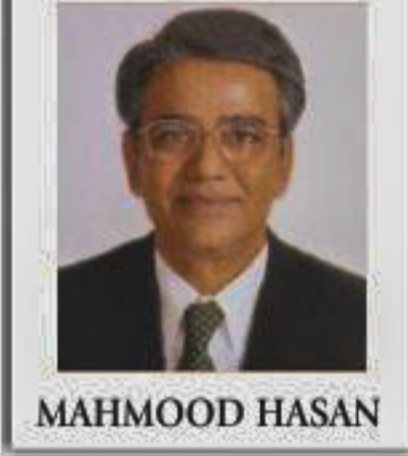
practice in many countries.

Academic and other quality standards required by National University and UGC (hardly enforced at present) have to be strictly enforced in selected colleges for this initiative. Financial and personnel provisions have to be made for this purpose under a special project.

A National Teaching Service Corps (NTSC), with attractive remuneration and status, is seen as a key step that will create a national

# The Russians have come to Syria

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

*Putin's action is a clear message to the West that Russia is a world power to be reckoned with. He is ready to use his military power to back his diplomatic goals. He is also sending a message to the West to not meddle with Russia over Ukraine.*

**T**HERE has been a new twist in the narrative of the Syrian civil war. In a dramatic move, the Russian air force bombed "terrorist" positions in Syria for the first time on September 30, 2015.

As Europe reeled under the massive surge of migrants from Syria, the imperative to resolve the crisis has turned out to be of utmost priority for America and Europe. But no progress could be made as Russia, which firmly backs Bashar Al Assad, was shunned by the West for two years for annexing Crimea.

President Obama and President Putin in their speeches at the 70th UN General Assembly laid out plans to resolve the Syrian crisis. Both men liberally criticised each other and reiterated their respective positions.

Obama was categorical that 'brutal' Bashar Assad has to quit and cannot be part of any peace process. However, Obama said he was ready to work with the allies of Assad "including Russia and Iran" to put an end to this situation.

Washington did not seem to have any effective plan apart from demanding Assad's removal. Putin argued that the removal of Assad would lead Syria to the situation persisting currently in lawless Iraq and Libya. Assad's ouster will lead to carnage of the Alawite Shia population in Syria. He pointed out that it would be "an enormous mistake to refuse to co-operate with the Syrian government and its armed forces who are valiantly fighting terrorism face-to-face."

After delivering their speeches on September 28, Obama and Putin sat down to discuss Syria. It was the first encounter of the two men after a hiatus of two years. Though the meeting was described as constructive, American and Russian positions were poles apart on the fate of Assad.

There was, however, one important point of convergence. Both Obama and Putin wanted to defeat and dismantle ISIS. Putin informed Obama that Russia would be willing to join the fight

against "terrorism". Events moved quickly thereafter. On September 30, Syrian President Assad requested Russia to help Syria against ISIS. The Russian parliament immediately authorised President Putin to help Syria militarily. The same day Putin asked its air force to bomb ISIS positions near Homs in Syria.

Putin has gone about the legality of military intervention with great care. Russian bombing in Syria is at the request of a friendly Syrian government, as required under international law. The US-led coalition bombing in Syria is not backed by either any UN resolution or any request from the Syrian government. Putin has described them as unlawful and called upon the US to stop the bombing in the country.

As is required under diplomatic norms, Russia did not directly inform the US about the bombing. It was conveyed through the Russian Embassy to the US Embassy in Baghdad.

Putin's quick and determined action came to prop up the Assad regime, which is besieged by rebel groups and ISIS. During the past weeks, Russia strengthened its naval base in Tartus, from where the Russian jets flew combat missions. What is surprising is that even after knowing about the Russian buildup, the US did not have any policy on how to deal with it. The Russians had taken the Americans with their hands down.

Syria has been a strong Russian ally since the Soviet days. Russia cannot agree to Assad's ouster and lose its base in Syria. This strategic base gives the Russian naval force a toe-hold in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and Putin is determined to protect this base.

Putin's action is a clear message to the West that Russia is a world power to be reckoned with. He is ready to use his military power to back his diplomatic goals. He is also sending a message to the West to not meddle with Russia over Ukraine. Putin wants the Western sanctions withdrawn and to re-enter the powerful club of G8. The Paris summit of October 2, 2015 involving Putin, French President Francois Holland, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is a clear indicator in that direction.



Immediately after the Russian action, the White House rushed to "deconflict" their air operations inside Syria. Pentagon Spokesman Peter Cook on September 30 said that the purpose of the "de-confliction discussions" was to ensure that the ongoing US-led coalition air strikes against ISIS are not interrupted by any future Russian military activity, and to avoid misjudgment and miscalculation. Moscow and Washington are currently talking to avoid conflicts in Syria.

Actually, there are too many players in this conflict. Russia's entry has complicated the already complex Syrian tangle. Washington has "condemned" Russia's action, while others have expressed "grave concern" at Russia's entry into the Syrian crisis. China and Iran have expressed hope that Russia's move will help Syria move towards a resolution of the crisis.

The Syrian Civil War has attracted two very powerful militaries in opposing situations to fight "terrorism". Americans see only one "terrorist" - ISIS. Russia sees two "terrorists" - ISIS and anti-Assad rebels. The West has already accused Russia of bombing anti-Assad rebel positions. Russian bombers will certainly not distinguish between ISIS and the rebels, as both are threats to Assad. The days of ISIS in Syria, thus, might just be numbered.

Clearly, Obama's policy on Syria has failed. The coming weeks will tell whether the Russian combat missions will compel the West to cooperate and draw up a peace plan to end the humanitarian disaster in Syria. It would be interesting to see Assad's role in that peace process.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**Eduardo Galeano**  
Journalist and writer

*No history is mute. No matter how much they own it, break it, and lie about it, human history refuses to shut its mouth. Despite deafness and ignorance, the time that was continues to tick inside the time that is.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

Across

- 1 Like the Capitol
- 2 Track shape
- 3 Spider's kin
- 4 Series-ending abbr.
- 5 Showy flower
- 6 Scarlett's love
- 7 Spoil
- 8 DVR button
- 9 Otherwise
- 10 Coloring agents
- 11 Musical set in Argentina
- 12 Field of films
- 13 Slogan
- 14 Slop slurper
- 15 Bullring cheer
- 16 -Abner
- 17 "You bet!"
- 18 Bengal beast
- 19 Barber's tool
- 20 Resort off Venezuela
- 21 Uncooked
- 22 Thurman of "Kill Bill"
- 23 Conference site of 1945
- 24 Battery end
- 25 Luggage ID
- 26 Tavern drink
- 27 Sniper's garb, for short
- 28 Enthusiasm
- 29 Nasal sound
- 30 Farmer
- 31 Evade
- 32 Mistake
- 33 Kanye's music
- 34 Flag feature
- 35 "Dear me!"
- 36 It may be furrowed
- 37 Feedbag bit
- 38 In the style of
- 39 Choir voice
- 40 Wrong
- 41 Sofa accessory
- 42 Poem of praise
- 43 Tennis hit
- 44 Power provider
- 45 Crew member
- 46 Dark wood

DOWN

- 1 1920s art style

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

M	I	N	D	S	W	A	T		
M	A	N	I	A	C	O	R	T	
E	R	I	E	S	P	H	E	L	
T	O	P	H	A	T	R	A	M	
S	E	E	S	P	H	E	L	P	
C	U	K	E	S					
Q	U	A	I	N	T	C	A	P	
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A	T	E	A	M	P	A	D	R	E
W	A	N	D	A	A	R	L	E	S
S	T	O	P	L	E	E	S		

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott