

| FOLLOW UP |

From January 11, 2016 teachers' strike over pay and status disparity suspended academic activities of all the thirty seven public universities in Bangladesh for nine days. The dissatisfaction among the teachers started to brew last year when the 8th pay scale was announced abolishing the post of selection grade professors which was equal to the post of secretary in salary and status. Besides, the status and salary of the bureaucrats have been upgraded by creating a superior post called 'Senior Secretary' which is at least two times higher than the 'Senior Professor', the highest rank of the university professors introduced by the new pay scale.

consists of civil servants under the University Grants Commission. However, it is very obvious that a university teacher should be promoted based on his scholarly researches, publications and achievements in his own discipline -- something that civil servants may have no idea about at all.

In the last six years, from 2010 to 2016 this government has established six new public universities. However, no visible steps have been taken to invest on the fundamental researches in the universities. Currently, public university teachers do not get any government scholarship for

THE UNRESOLVED CONUNDRUM

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Thus, despite the fact that the pay has increased, the status along with salary have gone down.

However, from the very beginning, the demand of the agitated professors to remove the discriminatory provisions of the new pay scale has been harshly refuted. The Prime Minister herself criticized the professors saying, "If you want status equal to secretaries, just resign and become a secretary by sitting examinations through the PSC" (The Daily Star, January 12, 2016). The protesting professors replied, "We don't want to be secretaries. Why would we want to be secretaries? It's us who make secretaries."

However, after a weeklong deadlock, the ice started to melt when the Prime Minister invited the protesting teachers to her residence for an informal meeting on 18th of the month. Eventually, the Prime Minister promised steps to be taken whereupon professors would be promoted to grade 1 from grade 3.

The promises made by the Prime Minister have been appreciated well. However, the promise should not be limited to only increasing the salary and upgrading status. For a sustainable solution, our leaders should look at the root of this national crisis.

In its election manifesto in 2008, the current government promised that they would set a separate pay scale for university teachers. But it was never implemented. Still university teachers are getting paid in comparison with the bureaucrats although the nature of the two professions is entirely different.

A university teacher receiving promotions is also in the hands of the bureaucrats -- to be more specific, a committee

THE PROMISES MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER HAVE BEEN APPRECIATED WELL. HOWEVER, THE PROMISE SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED TO ONLY INCREASING THE SALARY AND UPGRADING STATUS. FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION, OUR LEADERS SHOULD LOOK AT THE ROOT OF THIS NATIONAL CRISIS.

research or higher education. Once teachers would ask for research grants or scholarships for higher studies, allegations of them being politically motivated or involved in corruption would creep up to make them silent again. For a few unethical ones, all teachers are unfairly deprived of their legitimate rights.

If we think of our nation as a human body, then university sector would be its brain. In Bangladesh almost all the skilled manpower -- in technical fields, administration, judiciary, or development sector -- are created by university professors. If these creators do not get the proper facilities, the trickledown effect would be fatal. Eventually, there would be no dedicated, capable scholars and teachers in the country and our nation will run like a ship without a rudder.

| FESTIVAL |

SHAKRAIN: A FESTIVAL OF KITES AND FIREWORKS

NILIMA JAHAN
PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

According to the solar calendar, on the last day of the Bengali month -- 'Poush', the sun moves towards its southward (Dakshinayana) journey at the Tropic of Capricorn and starts moving towards the Tropic of Cancer. The day is known as 'Poush Sangkranti', also 'Makar Sangkranti' all over the world. The day is celebrated by the Hindu community in India, Nepal and Bangladesh in many cultural forms, with a variety of names like- 'Maghe sangkranti', (Nepal), 'Saakrat' (Delhi and Haryana), 'Uttarayan' (Gujarat), 'Maghi' (Punjab) and many more.

In Bangladesh, the festival is well-known as 'Shakraim Festival'. Shakraim, on the whole, is a festival of colourful kites, fireworks, fire-breathing, paper balloons, food festival and many more. The festival has been celebrating in here since Mughal period. Perhaps, the history is more primitive.

Last week, the Dhakaites celebrated the festival in Laxmibazar, Tantibazar, Shankhari bazar, Shutrapur, Dholaikhal, Lalbagh, Chwakhbazar, Bongshal, Dhupkhola, Sadarghat and Jagannath University. Though it is a festival of the Hindus, in Bangladesh, it is more or less celebrated by the people of all religions.

The festival began in the morning with colourful kites from the rooftops in the older part of town. On the occasion of Shakraim, people have been buying kites 15 days ahead of the grand celebration. The price of each kite ranged between 5- 60 takas. "When we were young, we would make kites with paper, colour them and then fly them all day long," says 38-year-old Liton Datta, a businessman of Shankhari Bazar. "I can still remember Dukhu, a popular fellow in the area who would make kites for the people of Shankhari bazaar every year."

The kites have their distinct names for the shapes, sizes and designs, like- hearts, goggles, squares, eyes, angry birds and so on. Children, youngsters, middle aged people from different areas take part in the battle of 'Chuddi' (in old town, kite is 'ghuddi') which is called 'Manja'.

"Today, approximately, I have cut down 33 kites. Hopefully, my friends will arrange another party to celebrate this," says 15-year-old Arun Roy, a teen from Laxmibazar area. "We have created an event on facebook and invited people of all ages on our rooftop. But, amongst all, I am the best performer!" Arun is a student of class seven at Pogoj Laboratory High School.

Meanwhile, different kinds of rice cakes, deserts and confections are made for the occasion. The oldest member of the family fast on that day and say a prayer known as 'Buro-buri Pujo'.

The kite fighting gets all the more serious in the afternoon. Even the oldest members of the family join the youth. Though primarily, Shakraim was regarded as a festival of kites and rice cakes, now-a-days, new dimensions have been added by the young ones. From every rooftop, colourful paper balloons, fire breathers and thousands of fireworks enchant the people of all ages. Also there are laser lightings, music, and dance parties arranged by



the youth. "We have bought 25 paper balloons. Papa says that if I make wish while flying the balloons, my wish will come true!" says Adriza Nandi, a six-year-old girl, daughter of Abinash Nandi, a jewellery businessman of Laxmibazar.

The festival is basically an event of joy, happiness and friendship. The scenes of Shakraim demonstrate the canvas of brotherhood and cheerfulness of old Dhaka dwellers.



ABOUT TOWN

EMK MAKERLAB AND DHAKA ARTIST HUB
PRESENTS-BUILDING A
PHOTOGRAPHY ENTREPRENEURSHIP
VENUE: EMK CENTRE, DHANMONDI 27
DATE: JANUARY 23RD

BUILDING A PHOTOGRAPHY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

January 23, 10am - 4pm
EMK Centre, House 5, Road 16 (New) 27 (Old), 9th floor, Midas Centre, Dhanmondi.
Hosted by EMK Makerlab and Dhaka Artist Hub
Registration Fee: 1000 Taka
For query- 01973338889 or visit- <https://www.facebook.com/events/794346184024464/>

Education UK Exhibition 2016
Dhaka: 28, 29 Jan 16
Chattogram: 31 Jan 16
Sylhet: 1 Feb 16
#EduK2016

EDUCATION UK EXHIBITION 2016

January 28-29, 12 - 6 pm
Pan Pacific Sonargaon, 107 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Hosted by- British Council Bangladesh
For Registration- <http://bit.ly/exhibitiondhk2016>
For more information, visit- <https://www.facebook.com/events/203281416681260/>

Sunakali
Teenage Girls' Journey to Glory

DHAKA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2016

January 22, 10 am- 8 pm
Bangladesh National Museum, Shahbagh, Dhaka
Hosted by: Sunakali
For Tickets and Query, visit- <https://www.facebook.com/events/1031887490205357/>