

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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OUR SCHOOLS NEED
BETTER FACILITIES, NOW

PG 3

ALL THAT'S WRONG WITH
THE NATIONAL SCHOOL
CURRICULUM

PG 4



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT OUR SCHOOLS?



PHOTO: NAYEM SHAAN

EDITORIAL

Change is hard. Somewhere between dearly holding onto things you love and consciously letting go to move on, you collect people, lessons, and memories along the way.

In my first editorial, when I was a little lost about what to write, I realised I cared deeply about that week's cover story which was about our relationships with our siblings. This week too I find our cover story to be something I care a little too strongly for – spending on public education.

In the almost dizzying state of development we live in, with physical infrastructure bearing witness to our economic “progress”, my wish as a young person and as a citizen is that people are invested in. A country is as good as its people and what's important is to bridge the gap between hopeful kids and an education system that understands them.

On that hopeful note, I wish this special school issue can bring to light some of the challenges facing our education sector. I also hope SHOUT continues to speak up on what matters to kids the most and gives us something rewarding to wake up to every Thursday morning.

Happy reading!

– Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-Editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

TV SERIES



A loving send-off to our favourite *Derry Girls*

MRIITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

The appeal of *Derry Girls*, by design, lies in finding comedy in absolute tragedy. The indomitable and perennially optimistic outlook of the youth to want to live their lives and have fun no matter the state their country is in, is a feeling that is unlikely to be lost on young people anywhere.

As the girls (and James) cross armed soldiers every day on their way to school, have their values clash in a school that is too conservative for their liking, and bicker with their parents who themselves are struggling financially due to the state of their country, you relate in their anxieties, miseries, and rebelliousness.

No amount of intense socio-political trouble, parental curfews or sheer bad luck can distract the gang from worrying about life's real problems – saving money for trips, going to parties, trying to skip exams, or hitting it off with one's crush.

After a long wait past the first two seasons, which were truly “cracker”, writer and creator Lisa McGee, who wrote the show based on her own experience of growing up in Derry, finally delivers a fitting third season.

The new (and sadly last) season of *Derry Girls* in all honesty is a series of hits and misses that strung together in an overall treat for loyal fans, but doesn't manage to quite recreate the sparkling writing quality of the first two seasons.

Episode 4, “The Haunting”, was a personal favourite. The premise of the

girls (and James) travelling to the abandoned house of a deceased person on a stormy night does not disappoint. Some of the episodes were a miss, including one which has flashbacks to some of the characters' lives years ago. The rather wholesome season finale is set in the backdrop of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which mostly put an end to the “The Troubles”, the period of political upheaval which serves as the setting for the show.

The brazen and snarky Sister Michael, Principal of Our Lady Immaculate College and one of the villains of the girls' lives, gets a well-deserved longer screen time this season. She and Jenny Joyce are the stars in any school scene in the show for me.

The magic of *Derry Girls* is in the cramped spaces in Erin and Orla's house, with all the family members' oversized personalities fighting for space in their overcrowded living room. Each adult is a victim of their own situation and each young person believes they live in a world that lets them be who they are, almost in delusion, that they have a fair chance at a bright future and happiness.

Even though *Derry Girls* has ended, my mind still lives on in it, and is unlikely to ever escape, the truly bizarre and ridiculous detention scene from the pilot episode. After all, Derry is a state of mind.

Mrittika has started re-watching Derry Girls again from season 1. Send her quirky comedy show suggestions at mrittika.anan@gmail.com

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
DADDY PSY ft. CL of 2NE1	Something Stupid Frank Sinatra
Disco In The Dark SMOOCHES	Tempter Stereolab
Overthinking Orla Gartland	Big Rock Candy Mountain Burl Ives
Forest Whitaker Bad Books	Want Juniper Vale, Max Abrams

Email us at shoutds@gmail.com with feedback, comments, and reader submissions within 500 words.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Our schools need better facilities, now

HRISHIK ROY

I remember once walking out of my school's administrative office with a disappointing look on my face. The school administration had just rejected our plea to hire a coach for our school's debate club. This was not surprising.

To be fair, this is not something which happens in my school only, but most school authorities across the country seem to be extremely reluctant to invest in or arrange any facilities beyond the ones required minimum for academia.

Often, the computer labs of schools are not particularly well-equipped with the necessary facilities for students to use. To add salt to the wound, the staff in charge of these laboratories are often the least tech savvy people one can find, making it extremely hard for students to gain any useful insight about computing and technology.

The issues regarding the lack of facilities extend to other areas such as a lack of playing fields, sporting equipment, and adequate and diverse books in school libraries. This lack of facilities begs me to ask the question: why are most schools so tight-fisted when it comes to making room for any facility above the threshold of the bare minimum?

There is a very strong correlation between the extent of facilities offered by a school and the amount of funding that it receives in the form of tuition fees and subsidies. An expensive school in Dhaka teaching foreign curriculum might have a swimming pool for students to learn swimming. On the other hand, some schools do not even get a coach for their debate team.

This can be further illustrated using the fact that public schools, which receive subsidies or extract higher amounts of tuition from their students, outperform non-subsidised public schools in terms of the facilities they offer. A quick comparison between the facilities offered by public schools in Dhaka, which charge a higher tuition, and other public schools in major cities across the country exposes this stark contrast.

Additionally, this means that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often attend schools with less funding, are left behind compared to their counterparts from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Students from affluent backgrounds can easily access resources such as books, sporting equipment, or computers regardless of whether their school provides it for them. Therefore, this exacerbates class divisions in the long run.

The main solutions to this problem are very self-evident – increasing funding for schools in the form of subsidies as well as monitoring whether the school authorities are properly using the funds to provide better facilities for their students.

A proper education not only involves academics, but also includes a healthy balance of sports, fine arts, and performing arts among other things. Our schools need to have such facilities present for students to properly utilise.

Hrishik is a twelfth grader studying at Dhanmondi Tutorial. Please send him critical support, in the form of memes, so that he can survive A-Levels at hrdibbo@gmail.com

In the name of dress codes

FABIHA AFIFA

Lakshmipur madrasa teacher Manjurul Kabir Manzur made headlines in October 2021 when he was sent to jail for cutting hair of six students. Many similar incidents are reported across the country, where educators in question go as far as physically assaulting and publicly humiliating their students for failing to maintain a look "appropriate" for school.

Schools claim that dress codes foster equality and inclusivity, dissolving differences in race and social classes for example, and professionalism because homogeneity in pupils' appearances means that they are not distracted by each other's looks. However, very few people can explain exactly what professionalism students learn when their teachers grab them by their collars to cut their hair or where the inclusivity is in asking curvier girls to ditch skirts and shirts in favour of salwar kameez to hide their bodies better.

Rules about students' appearances such as no nail polish, henna, or loose hairstyles for girls and no long hair for boys are valued as unbreakable laws in our educational institutions. Acts of violence perpetuated by teachers for breaking these rules should make us wonder how strongly these rules should be enforced and more importantly, if they should exist at all.

Extreme measures to police students' appearance promotes values that no institution, especially educational ones, should promote: suppression of individuality and privacy.

Tazreen Jahan Bari, recent graduate of

Bangladesh University of Professionals, recalls, "There was a time in my school when girls had to take their socks off to show if they had nail polish on their toenails."

While this is problematic on its own, we should also recognise that this invasion of privacy contributes to the continuation of very toxic practices in our society like body shaming, gendering fashion, and sexualisation of underage girls.

It gets especially worrisome when this desire to control what students wear branch out of the classroom. I still remember how a supervisor at my school once called in one of my friends, in the middle of class, just to berate her for 15 minutes because he had seen her out with her mother the evening before when she had committed the cardinal sin of wearing jeans.

Standardised dressing in schools does not have to be so problematic, in my opinion. The idea of all students being on a level ground is something anyone can get behind. It is only when there is absolutely no room for students' individual identities and independence that dress codes become unwelcome and ironically, discriminating.

Ultimately, we must remember why we need education in the first place: to be free and let free. When it comes to fighting for freedom in our overly reactionary education system, I cannot think of any better place to start than our own bodies.

Fabiha is secretly a Lannister noblewoman and a Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance and soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

All that's wrong with the national school curriculum

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

One summer afternoon in class 9, our Physical Education teacher faced the biggest conundrum of his career as he had to talk to some 17-year-olds about menstruation. Hesitantly, he talked about adolescence for 10 minutes.

Even if I dare call those uncomfortable minutes a National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) approved version of sex education, words such as periods, menstruation, or sanitary pads were completely prohibited. After finishing an entire chapter within minutes, he excitedly went on to teach us the measurements of a handball field, a sport none of us had the opportunity of trying out in real life.

If we excuse the inadequacies of his attempt at teaching us about sexual health without acknowledging any of the terminologies related to it, the incomplete nature of our sex education syllabus is just the tip of the sunken ship that is our high school curriculum.

Our curriculum also caters to our culture's fixation with choosing science over commerce or arts as students' preferred lane of education. Most schools make students with good grades pursue science and force students with poorer grades to choose the rest, regardless of their ambitions. Not only is this discriminatory towards students with low grades, an established culture of prioritising science has created a perception that only the most academically gifted can be allowed to pursue the subject. As a consequence, parents expect their children to choose science regardless of their children's interests.

"There is a false narrative that commerce is inherently easier than science, which is simply not true," says Anindya Alam, an undergraduate student at BUET. "Students with holistically poorer grades have to study subjects that might actually be much more difficult for them than science might've been."

A majority of educational institutions don't even have options for commerce or arts available until college. Once a student is forced to choose science in class 9 and stick to it until SSC exams, the shift from science to commerce in college becomes a difficult choice.

Meanwhile, the opposite – from commerce or arts to science – is practically impossible. The consequences are noticed in university entrance exams where a large number of students from science backgrounds migrate to commerce or arts majors every year. This substantiates the inefficiency of our current system.

Another crucial failure of our high school curriculum is its inadequacy to identify mental health issues and make students aware of it from a young age.

"Mental health is probably the most ignored topic in the whole academic life of a student," says Tasmin Khan, another student at BUET. "Some theoretical lessons are found in books but they're neither sufficient nor taught by people who're professionals in dealing with mental health. Students also aren't getting any counselling for learning to care for their emotions and master cognitive behaviour."

While our society fails to identify mental health as a part of our well-being, our high

school curriculum introducing mental health issues in the course syllabus can help guide our kids into handling their emotions responsibly and in the process, start normalising mental health on a larger scale.

Ironically, the biggest shortcomings in our curriculum are evident in traditionally prioritised subjects like Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics. Board approved books on Mathematics aren't application-oriented and focus heavily on solving problems. They lack explanations of mathematical theories which ought to develop the fundamentals, before approaching mathematical problems. The same goes for Chemistry and Physics as well.

"Board-approved Physics textbooks lack elaborate explanations and students need to take help of college-level books or tutors to understand the concepts,"

specific information from stories or poems which doesn't fairly evaluate the examinee's comprehension of the text. English for Today, the board-approved English book is constantly made fun of owing to its bland choice of essays and poems, its futility in comprehending the linguistic capabilities of its readers, and its consequent failure in developing students' proficiency in English. The tests don't include aspects such as vocabulary or discourse analysis which are crucial factors in learning the language. The result is our students' subsequent anxiety, discomfort, and inefficiency regarding English.

Subjects like "Work and Life Oriented Education", "Career Education" and "Agricultural Studies" were intended to help develop a student's competence in the more practical side of affairs. However,

class performance, and the remaining 50 percent based on public exams. However, the remaining five subjects – Life and Livelihood, Religion, Physical and Mental Health, Arts and Culture, and Science and Technology will have their entire marks based on school performances.

This new curriculum might have detrimental repercussions according to multiple school teachers like Habib Ullah, senior teacher at Ideal School and College.

"With 5 of the 10 major subjects being graded entirely based on class performances, these subjects will lose their value as students will focus more on the remaining five subjects that'll be included in the public exams," Habib explains.

"Consequently, these subjects might prove to be impractical owing to the grading sys-



PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

continues Anindya. "Chemistry, as a subject in Bangladesh, doesn't prioritise application-based studies at all. Most high school students despise Chemistry owing to its heavy reliance on memorisation."

Crucial chapters discussing industrial chemistry or laboratory safety end up being regarded as hassles as students have to memorise irrelevant information for MCQs.

The curriculum relying less on theoretical study and more on mathematical problems has created a problematic culture among our students. Students can easily get away with exams by memorising how to solve particular types of mathematical problems that make frequent appearances in board exams.

The problem is apparent in subjects like Bangla and English as well. Though the NCTB approved Bangla textbooks are rich in content, the problem lies in their execution as the question pattern in exams is extraneous and inept. The MCQ portion, for instance, relies heavily on memorising

in reality, students consider these subjects to be nothing but hassles compared to Science or Mathematics. Our culture of coaching classes has already contrived a way to capitalise on these courses included in the curriculum. The fact that high school students are considering taking tuition on a subject that's meant to prepare them for their careers depicts a dark portrayal of our collective understanding of education. It also portrays NCTB's shortcomings in devising the course content of these subjects.

NCTB plans to initiate a new curriculum by 2025 which will reportedly emphasise competence rather than theoretical knowledge and remove separate streams of education in classes 9-10. The Ministry has identified 10 such sectors of competence that they believe students should master by the time they pass the class 12. According to the proposed curriculum, students of classes 9 and 10 will get 50 percent of their marks in Bangla, English, Maths, Science and Social Science based on

tem. Scopes of corruption might also be an issue if the grading's left in the hands of the schools."

The Ministry also plans to implement the same strategy in classes 11 and 12 where 30 percent will be based on class performance and 70 percent based on public exams.

The development of our national curriculum is an extensive and cumbersome process. The only silver lining is that NCTB is aware of the problems and intends to redefine our entire education system. With revised course contents, rewritten board books and new subjects prioritising students' skills and competence outside bookish theories, the success clearly depends on its proper execution. Unfortunately, when it comes to the precise execution of proposed ideas, NCTB doesn't have a decent track record.

Remind Ifi to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

Too many problems, not enough budget for our public schools

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Students lucky enough to attend a private school will never understand Jhuma Akhter, a student of class 7 at Kurni Jalal Uddin High School, Mirzapur, Tangail. Jhuma, who loves everything about her school and wants to become a doctor, cannot bring herself to believe that her school does not have a Biology lab.

As the budget for our education sector shrinks with each passing year, the maladies of our government-funded schools pile up, and students like Jhuma question the development this sector has gone through in the last decade.

In the fiscal year 2021-2022, the total budget allocated to the education sector was Tk 71,951 crore – 11.9 percent of the national budget. In that, Tk 36,486 crore, Tk 26,311 crore, and Tk 9,154 crore were allocated for secondary and higher education, primary and mass education, and technical and madrasa education, respectively.

The entirety of the budget allocated for education makes up a mere 2.08 percent of the GDP, reduced from the previous year, despite the education sector being adversely affected by the pandemic.

Not only are we far from the standard public expenditure on education set by UNESCO, we are also lagging behind compared to other South Asian countries. In 2015, UNESCO set the average public expenditure for education to 4 to 6 percent of GDP, or 15 to 20 percent of total budget. A 2020 report by UNICEF denotes Bangladesh to be the lowest spending country in the region where others such as Bhutan, Nepal, and Afghanistan spent 6.6 percent, 5.2 percent, and 4.1 percent respectively.

Lack of resources is often cited as the key reason behind our below-average budget for education. This is not entirely true.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed, Professor Emeritus of Brac University and vice chairperson and advisor to Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) states, "As a low-income country, there is no denying that we lack resources. But even with the available resources, we can afford to allocate a bigger percentage of the budget to the education sector. How can we justify our budget when countries with far less can afford to allocate a bigger budget for education? Then, it comes down to priority."

A below-average budget is not the only reason our public schools are facing so many challenges. Dr Ahmed reasons, "The Ministry of Education is supposed to give a plan depicting how they want to spend their budget. Based on this plan and proposal, the Ministry of Finance will allocate the budget. In reality, we fail at the planning stage."

The lack of planning and proper execution is evident in the rate of expenditure throughout the year. A 2019 World Bank report shows that although around 90 percent of the allocated budget is utilised each year, it's not done systematically throughout the year. The same

report states that half the total expenditure is carried out in the last quarter, with extremely high expenses in June.

Moving on to the consequences of such a budget, Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of CAMPE mentioned in a 2018 interview with The Daily Star, "There are three main weaknesses that are common to many of our educational institutions. First is the quality of teachers. Thousands of teachers are recruited every year and sent straight to classrooms without any training."

Besides efficient training, under-compensation also contributes to the lack of quality in our classrooms.

Md. Abdul Karim, headmaster of Bindubasini Govt. Boys' High School, Tangail comments, "Government school teachers get paid according to a pay scale. But it is not enough. So, they often engage in other economic activities or maintain a side job. As promotions take a long time, the salary doesn't increase annually. Even when one gets a promotion, the salary does not increase much, so it doesn't make much difference."

Md. Atwar Rahman, senior teacher at Anjuman Adarsha Govt. High School in Netrokona, adds, "Although we get our salaries regularly, we are often denied additional allowances like travel allowances due to insufficient funds."

The inefficient training, inadequate compensation and non-existent accountability produces ill-qualified and unmotivated teachers.

A student of Rajshahi Collegiate School, Zobaer Bin Zoha, expresses, "Although some of my teachers are good, most of the teachers hardly explain things in class. As a result, we have no choice but to get private tutors or be admitted into coaching centres."

The challenges of our public schools do not end here. The schools are often ill-equipped. As Jhuma from Kurni Jalal Uddin High School mentions, "We do not have any labs or computer facilities in our schools. We are also not given tiffin from the school like other government schools."

Furthermore, the National Education Policy of 2010 stating the teacher-student ratio to be 1:30 is yet to be implemented in most government schools across the country. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics, as of 2018, the ratio remains 1:35 for secondary schools while primary schools show signs of improvement at 1:30. The picture on the ground, however, speaks a more complex truth as students like Zobaer and Jhuma states having 50-60 students per class.

Public expenditure in the education sector also fails to accommodate the entirety of our student body. According to the Directorate of Primary Education's 2017 report, 77.7 percent of primary level students go to government-run schools. However, almost a third of the student body seeks pre-primary education from privately-owned institutions, such as private or NGO-run kindergartens.

The situation is worse in secondary education sector. According to a 2018 report by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), a

staggering 98 percent of the secondary institutions are privately owned or managed; 82 percent of these institutions receive Monthly Pay Orders (MPOs) as teacher salaries. Although the number illustrates a significant percentage, only a handful teachers from subsidised schools receive this salary.

Considering the myriad problems inflicting our government-funded schools, it is not surprising that those who can afford it are opting for private or hybrid schools instead. This shift from public to private schools is causing the loss of equity and inclusion in our education sector.

Things changed for the worse when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Not only did students drop out, those who continued to study experienced difficulties grappling with advanced class materials. While the academic year moved on, many students could not learn online.

Zobaer shares his experience, "I am suddenly in class 8 when I hardly learned anything in class 7 during on-line classes. Now I do not understand what the teachers are trying to teach."

The teachers also face difficulty teaching ill-prepared students. Lubna Jahan, senior teacher at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College says, "My students of class 3 were admitted into school mid-pandemic. They had passed classes 1 and 2 online. Now, in class 3, I can see that most of them have not been able to grasp the materials of previous two academic years."

Given the education sector is recovering from the damage caused by the pandemic, Dr Ahmed suggests, "While planning the budget, we first need an assessment and remedial plan. The remedial plan needs to address the knowledge gap that students are facing. Secondly, we need a few months of intense schooling so they can catch up, which can be easily done by shifting the academic year from June to September."

Admittedly, the education budget is not the only reason behind the shortcomings of our public school sector. However, if we are to ensure equity, inclusion, and quality education – change needs to start from here, and soon.

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Tazreen is your typical procrastinator suffering from last-minute-motivation syndrome. Send help at tazreenzah-an@gmail.com



ECHOES BY
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

Adapting students from diverse academic backgrounds

I Children in Bangladesh start education at playgroup, kindergarten or Class 1 under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board; others start under the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. These different streams of education have different medium, syllabi, and curricula.

The pre-university assessments include the SSC and HSC, under different boards, and the O and A Levels, under Edexcel and Cambridge. The pre-university education of Bangladesh is as varied as the colours of a rainbow.

Bangladesh is not the only country where the education system is segregated. The UK has faith schools, state schools, public schools that are actually private, and boarding schools. The challenge lies when all the fountains, streams, and rivers of education meet at the sea – the tertiary level – generally known as the university.

Universities in Bangladesh are also segregated into several groups. First, there are the general and technical public universities. Secondly, the institutes that fall under the National University. Third, the Bangladesh Open University. And finally, the private universities.

Once students pass the admission exams to pursue tertiary education, the next challenge for the educators is how to address students who come from different



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

pre-university backgrounds. Or is it not that much of a problem?

II The students are separated into two streams. They are either only SSC-HSC, or a mix of SSC-HSC and O-A Levels. There is probably no university that has one stream only. When the set of intakes are from one stream only, it is perhaps easy for educators to address students and build them up in their first year. The challenge arises when

there is a mix of SSC-HSC and O-A Levels. As I teach Economics at university, I can tell, this is a challenge for the department. Let me explain.

Pre-university Economics is more advanced in O-A Levels. When we have a set of first-year students from mixed backgrounds, it becomes a challenge to streamline the two sets of students. One would expect private universities to face this challenge more since most of the O-A Level students are absorbed in this cate-

gory. However, in public universities, we are observing a growing mixture of both streams in recent times.

Private universities have a different challenge when it comes to elementary Economics courses. First, there is the mix of students. Second, elementary Economics is taught at the same time in departments and disciplines outside Economics. Third, almost all private universities have a maximum class size for each section, meaning the same course will probably be taught by several teachers. Finally, the semester for an elementary course is too short. This seriously challenges quality delivery.

III Helping first year students from diverse academic and other backgrounds adapt is a challenge for all universities. If this is not addressed, then chances are high for two things to happen. One group becomes disenchanted. Those who come from adaptable backgrounds make a head-on start, which sadly can contribute to inequality. Universities have a role to play as parents. Keeping this in mind is of utmost importance for them.

Asrar Chowdhury is a professor of Economics. He follows Test cricket, listens to music, and spins vinyls when he has free time. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

Our schools deserve better leadership

School boards – how good of a job are they doing?

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Back in November 2017, an announcement by the ruling political party's student body alarmed educationists and parents of school kids around the country. The announcement, made after an "emergency" meeting of its central executive body, instructed its organisational units to set up committees at secondary schools.

The idea was dismissed soon after, with reasoning that students were already burdened with academic workload, and the need for such committees within schools would only weigh school children down with "politics".

While that may have been the end of that saga, it seems that politics within schools never went away entirely. While authorised political activities among school students doesn't exist, one can easily get a whiff of it going on in the background, especially among those running the schools.

Local government or political representatives have almost always been associated with school boards in our country, especially government schools. In a way,

having local representatives within these boards is a good thing, because if anything, these representatives can oversee school activities and monitor overall performance and standards. However, the case has been quite different in our country.

In 2017, a school ground in Narayan-ganj was used as the wedding venue of the son of one of the school's committee members. All the preparations were being taken during school hours, when students were inside the classroom. Needless to say, the preparations were disrupting the lessons, but who could the students turn to for help when their school's so-called leader was the one causing the chaos?

A similar incident happened in Dhaka when the principal of a renowned school was found guilty of arranging a cattle market on the school grounds. The principal was also facing investigation over several other issues, including admission irregularities, and was caught in the act of verbally abusing governing body members as well as talking about their political influence in the same conversation.

Despite being isolated incidents, they

all have one thing in common. It is always an authority figure in the background who is pulling the strings, and that too at the school and its students' expense. Showcasing their political influence is another thing these school leaders do at times to further benefit themselves, and their own interests.

Local government representatives being on school boards is never a bad thing. However, it ultimately comes down to these members and what they do with the power vested in them by the people of the school community.

Schools in other countries see their board members striving to establish the school's visions and goals during their time in office. However, it seems that the ones in control of our schools almost always gun for personal gains over the collective interest of the school, often creating a hostile political environment within, affecting teachers and students alike.

And at the end of the day, education is the one to suffer from such mismanagement and lack of able leadership.



ILLUSTRATION: JUNAID IQBAL ISHMAM

THE PERFECT STORM

NUSHRAH YANIDA

She is art I have no capacity to behold,
A palette smeared with colours, bold,
Teeming with secrets, unforeseen and untold.

She is merciless, torrential rain.
Look too close and suffer immeasurable pain,
But stray too far, and all one sees is dismal terrain.

She is chaos in its purest form.
To conventions, she does not conform.
She is, in all essentials, the perfect storm.

The writer is a student of class 12 at South Breeze School.



Eurocentric Standards drilled into a Brown Child's Head

SHANUM SARKAR

Sitting back and reminiscing back on times when I could hop on the bandwagon without having to worry about what my (untameable) hair looked like, an oh so favourite gratification.

Throughout my not so long life, I've always wanted to be called beautiful. Looking back however, I'd say I didn't want to be beautiful at all.

All I wanted was to be able to cater to a standard. Be held high up on a pedestal. Be the epitome of unattainable perfection. Fit a Eurocentric narrative. Be *beautiful*.

It is very unusual to get an uplifting response when I say I've never felt beautiful. I've never felt like I properly adhere to the Eurocentric beauty standard imposed upon us. I've never been the one to make jaws drop, make heads turn, or even be thought twice of. Long lists of ingredients off the kitchen shelf to be grinded and mixed to put onto your skin, a quick fix to brown (dirty) skin is the gift passed down our ancestral heritage.

This is not being said in a "please shower me with compliments that my dysmorphic self will never actually be able to comprehend (thanks to you)" kind of way. It's in a way where growing up, I've never been genuinely called beautiful.

Every time I was, it was something along the lines of me being "pretty enough" for someone with dark skin, pretty enough for someone who wasn't blessed with a Eurocentric nose.

As for the few times when the compliment wasn't backhanded, I always (still) somehow managed to convince myself it was out of pity. Now that I'm a little older but still the same old (brown skinned) self-conscious child on the inside, the entire concept of compliments puzzles me. I've only ever been complimented sarcastically as a child.

And now every time someone's paying heed to me, I get on pins and needles because I convince myself they're just doing me a favour out of pity. Every time I do get a compliment, I wonder if my femininity is limited to only being a perfectly masked eggshell with a rotten yolk on the inside. Being nothing but a pretty face; a divine body.

Being nothing but a human sculpture to be gazed at: critiqued upon
A picture-perfect sparkly trophy, ready to be won. (Guess I'm everything but human.)

Do not get me wrong, I have been called beautiful, countless times. By countless people. Apparently, it's now cool to be more "accept-



ing" and forthcoming to the idea that people come in all shapes and sizes (and colours). The desperate cry for "acceptance", for a yarn woven down to show the earthly grace of your inheritance and a defiance to colonialism, from your very own people is something that I don't think will ever sit right with me.

And by that, do you really think I'm beautiful?
Or do I better cater to your (Somehow still existent but altered by the skin of your teeth) standards now?

Shanum closely resembles a raccoon, send her reasons to cut down on caffeine at shanumsarkar18@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Our teachers are *underpaid and undervalued*

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The task of a teacher, an educator, is not an easy one. Not only are they responsible for educating the students, they are expected to be caregivers who provide children with a holistic understanding of how the world works.

Teachers are inherently expected to utilise their own time to plan out lessons, grade papers while keeping track of the progress made (or not) for each student, and even just make themselves available to their students. However, under the burden of all these expectations and accusations of not doing enough, do we truly acknowledge our teachers?

"I started teaching because it intrigued me. I was inspired by my brother-in-law when I was in primary school myself. Being able to use the knowledge I have acquired, and pass that on encouraged me to become a teacher. Having been a teacher since 2004, however, I am not at all satisfied by my income as a teacher," said Md. Shofiqul Islam, English and Civics teacher at KBM High School, Thakurgaon.

The sad reality is that most of our teachers are underpaid and undercompensated. Earlier this year, it was announced that government primary school teachers would be paid according to the 13th grade, with salary ranging from Tk 11,000 to 26,500. Under the same order, trained and untrained headmasters would be paid under the 11th grade.

As for teachers from non-government schools, they are usually offered a salary around or lower than those with MPO (Monthly Pay Order) facilities, subject to the amount of revenue derived from tuitions and other funds.

According to Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury, chairman of Bangladesh Kindergarten, School and College Oikya Parishad, "Most of the salary for non-MPO teachers are derived from the tuition received (which

is pretty low itself), after the rent and other utility bills have been paid. During Covid-19, when most parents were either unable to send their children to school or manage connecting online, schools received extremely low funds, causing many teachers were either left with payments below their income level, or were unpaid for months."

Even if we assumed that most teachers were being paid close to, or around the value set by the government, the question remains, is it enough?

In February 2022, the inflation rate was 6.17 percent, which climbed to 6.29 percent in April. Prices of commodities have risen sharply, and the rate at which it has risen, is also increasing, indicating an increase in the cost of living. While these numbers and percentages are often incomprehensible to most people, a recent newspaper article I came across, written by a teacher from Rangunia, Chattogram, aptly expresses that "50,000 is not enough for a family to survive." Most teachers usually make significantly less than that.

When asked about his livelihood as a teacher, Shofiqul shares, "It is simply not enough to run a family, given that there is no support from the government and the amount received as tuition from students is basically negligible. I had to resort to side jobs and businesses. Initially, I would stock up on produce during harvest and resell them a few months later, and now I have a small grocery store next to a fuel station by the road, which allows me to make ends meet."

We also reached out to the principal of a school in Dhaka and asked her to connect us to teachers within her school. Upon requesting anonymity, she denied access to her teachers, conceding that they would all unanimously agree to have been underpaid, which would not reflect well on the institution.

While speaking about the current status

quo, Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury adds, "Both MPO and non-MPO teachers are underpaid, but at least there is a guarantee to a pay cheque for government-employed teachers, which other private school teachers don't have. During the pandemic alone, approximately 20,000 private institutions were shut down, and the number of teachers has reduced from approximately 10 lakhs to about 5 to 6 lakhs, as they had either been laid off or they quit after being severely underpaid."

Nazrul Islam Rony, president of Bangladesh Teachers Association, explains, "There is also a significant disparity that exists between the pay and benefits received by government-employed teachers and other civil servants as well. For example, the festival bonus set for teachers receiving MPO facilities was set at 25 percent in January 2004, and has not changed since then. Whereas, other workers employed by the government receive at least 50 percent of their basic, or the entirety, as festival bonus. There are also other benefits like rent discounts and healthcare, which teachers do not receive to the full extent when compared to other workers."

In 2016, it was announced that private tuitions were to be made illegal, and anyone offering private tuition would be convicted. Unfortunately, in a country where jobs are not paying enough and the use of their skills outside of their jobs is made to be illegal, there are very few options and opportunities for teachers.

Shofiqul continues to teach despite the hardships. He says, "Though there has only been a negligible increment in pay over the years, I can still not leave my job. It barely pays for anything, but I have put in about 20 years of my life into this career. Leaving would mean I am letting these years go in vain, and letting go of any benefits I may have received at the end of my career."

Thus, our teachers either remain in the profession and continue to be underpaid;

those who leave, forgo the years they have given to this career. Considering the nature of their profession, and the impact their work has on the lives of each and every one of us and society as a whole, it is especially disheartening that it has to stem from a place of sacrifice.

"If we do not pay our teachers what they deserve, we can neither expect the quality of our education to improve, nor can we expect any structural modifications to be carried out properly," urges Nazrul.

Whenever the quality of our education comes into question, directly or indirectly, the role of teachers is called into question. While teachers are not the only determinants of reform that our education system requires, they are crucial in making any change possible. However, the current levels of remuneration and incentives for teachers do not align with the expectation of greater effort.

"One of the last options appears to be teaching at the school level for college graduates in Bangladesh," states a report published by CAMPE and CPD in June 2016. As unfortunate as that may sound, it makes sense for college graduates to choose other professions that offer greater monetary incentives.

If we continue to brush off the impact of underappreciating and undervaluing our teachers and the efforts they put in, we must also be prepared to deal with the consequences where there may be no change to the quality of education, and a future generation where there are not enough teachers to educate the students.

Reference

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