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World Teachers' Day

VALUING TEACHER VOICES

Towards a new social contract for education

The role of teachers in nation-building is undeniable. They enhance students' intellectual growth, foster morality, and inspire patriotism. Since 1995, World Teachers' Day has been observed on October 5 to honour their contributions, following joint UNESCO and ILO recommendations on teachers' rights and dignity. This year's theme is "Valuing Teachers' Voice: Towards a New Social Contract for Education." Bangladesh celebrates the day by recognizing teachers' outstanding roles in education and development, promoting professional growth, and raising public awareness. Special supplements have been organized by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Education Out Loud, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to mark the occasion.



Reimagining Teachers and Teaching: A new opportunity must not be lost

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In the wake of the July-August 2024 student-led public uprising that toppled the long-entrenched authoritarian regime, citizens' high expectations about 'repair' of the broken state and reform in all sectors of public services have come to the fore. A historic opportunity has arisen to rethink the teachers' role and contribution as the pivot of change in education. We are reminded of this opportunity on the World Teachers' Day – the international day for celebrating and honouring teachers.

UNESCO proclaimed 5 October as World Teachers' Day in 1994 to celebrate and honour the work of teachers everywhere. It commemorates the signing of the 1966 "ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers." It is a standard-setting instrument that addresses the status and situations of teachers around the world. The standards relate to education personnel policy, recruitment, and initial training as well as the continuing education of teachers, their employment, and working conditions.

The theme of the 2024 World Teachers' Day is "valuing teacher voices: towards a new social contract for education." It's a day to honour teachers worldwide. One way to do so is to listen to their experiences and hear their voices about overcoming challenges and improving education for everyone.

It is often said that "No system of education can be better than its teachers." It is a truism that clearly remains meaningful. A teacher is still the custodian of the young – manush gora karigor. A teacher's role in society and the significance of the work that a teacher does cannot be compared with the role of other public service workers. It is not hyperbolic to say that to ignore the special role of a teacher in society is to place the future of the nation at peril.

To maintain a reasonable ratio of no more than 30 students per teacher in a classroom (not an average ratio of 30 for the country) at the primary level and 15-20 at the secondary level, given the subject-wise teacher needs at this level, the number of teachers and other education personnel needs to be increased significantly, doubling in the next 10 years from the current total of about 1 million. But how can it be ensured that capable and well-motivated young people, who do not see it as just another job, are attracted to teaching as a profession?

It is generally agreed that teaching at present is the last choice as an occupation for university graduates. The general pattern in South Asia is that graduates of tertiary education are appointed as teachers and then they are sent for training for a year or so. The assumption is that that's all they need by way of professional preparation and training for teachers. The poor quality of our degree colleges (and the consequent poor subject knowledge of graduates) and the sequential approach to teacher preparation (exclusive pedagogy training after college degree) has resulted in less capable, poorly prepared, and unmotivated teachers, many of whom are not committed to the profession.

A "concurrent" approach to teacher preparation in a four-year post-secondary programme, in contrast to the prevailing "sequential" approach, is the standard practice in most high-performing countries. The guiding principles in these countries reflect a continuum of professional development from initial identification of future teachers, enrolment in professional preparation, followed by professional support, applying performance standards and appropriate incentives and enhancing teachers' social esteem. India's 2020 Education Policy envisages a four-year post-secondary preparation as the standard teacher preparation approach, with a 10-year time frame to realise this transformation. For the concurrent approach to succeed, it has to be ensured that the four year college courses are of acceptable quality.

International attention is being focused on teachers as the pivot of educational change. The Transforming Education Summit at the UN in September 2023 noted that 69 million new and better prepared teachers would be needed to achieve the SDG of quality primary and secondary education for all by 2030.

The past government claimed credit for a major expansion of student enrolment including girls, growth in the number of educational institutions, stipends for school students, distribution of free textbooks, and use of multimedia in classrooms. These have not produced satisfactory learning outcomes due to deficits in planning, school management, accountability, and pursuit of an education vision. A critical lack has been not to have engaged teachers with professional skills, commitment to teaching, and a career path for them that would motivate and inspire them to give their best.

Expectations are high from the interim government about change and reform in many areas of development including education. What is to be done, with what priorities and time frame are difficult to decide.

An education consultative group of experts and stakeholders should examine the status and the priorities in the education sector and advise the interim government. They would look at the issues and suggest actions on urgent and immediate concerns as well as reforms that demand a longer timeframe. This group may be turned into a permanent, statutory commission as recommended in the 2010 education policy.

To look at education and human development in a holistic way, the consultative group will have to consider and advise on various policy questions related to the Sustainable Development Goals and national goals for building an equitable, inclusive and quality education system for all. These larger agenda would include: i) promoting an equitable society through education; ii) a time-bound plan for equitable and inclusive early childhood development and K-12 school education of acceptable quality for all iii) establishing decentralised district education authorities for planning and managing equitable K-12 education in every community; and iv) ensuring academic autonomy of the education system and education institutions, protecting them from partisan politics. In the context of these transformative reforms in education attention must be given to a key element --strengthening the teaching profession and the education workforce in respect of their professional skills, motivation, performance and adequacy of numbers as well as effective use of digital technologies in teaching and learning.

We cannot continue to brush off the impact of underappreciating and undervaluing our teachers and the work they do. The consequences and

cost of this neglect to society would be incalculably high– not enough teachers to offer the education the young deserves and a worsening quality of education mortgaging the future of the nation.



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Bring Back Teacher Voices for Education System's Reform

Fifty-eight years ago, on this day in 1966, in a special intergovernmental conference held in Paris, UNESCO-ILO adopted recommendations concerning the status of teachers. To mark the day, UNESCO proclaimed 5 October to be World Teachers Day in 1994. The day has been celebrated with due dignity in many countries, including Bangladesh, since 1995. Teachers have a long history in every society. They constitute a prominent part of our lives, generation after generation. This is not because they taught us languages or mathematics but, more importantly, for their role in teaching us how to learn things and live a better life. They are the pathfinders. People of each generation, collectively and as individuals, have many good memories of student life. A significant part of this is because of the teachers and our interactions with them. As students, we express our gratitude to all our teachers, from preschool to higher education, for their contribution to our lives on this special occasion. Let us celebrate this day to recognise and honour the contribution of our teachers.

As we celebrate World Teachers Day, it is crucial to reflect on the state of our teachers. Education is often hailed as the backbone of any nation, and teachers are the pillars that support this structure. However, we must ask ourselves: Is our education system's backbone strong enough to meet the evolving needs of the present generation? This question is not just a matter of academic discourse but a call to action for all stakeholders in the education sector. Teaching, in general, is much less attractive to our young people than any other profession. This is reflected in their choices of cadres in the Bangladesh Civil Services. Recently, the newspapers reported that 12 officers from the education cadre resigned and joined the administration, forest or tax departments.

We often see the education cadre officers protesting on the street-sagains deprivation. It also seems that young people joining the education cadre are interested in being officers, not teachers. An Education Watch study showed that over two-fifths of secondary school teachers had no aim to be teachers and that two-thirds had a second earning source for living. Unattractive remuneration, absence of a clear career path, and delayed or no promotion are some reasons for such a situation.

Anybody with a bare minimum qualification can participate in school teaching. On getting an opportunity, they receive training afterwards. A good portion of these teachers retire with no basic training. The latest official statistics show that a quarter of primary and 28% of secondary school teachers are untrained. There is also a scarcity of training provisions. The yearly intake of training institutions is much less than necessary; therefore, trained teachers are always deficient. As a result, a large number of school students are deprived of an education from trained teachers. The time has come to establish a certification system for

the teachers, with a periodic renewal provision, and to ensure that all students receive an education from adequately trained teachers. Such a system would help empower teachers as professionals and raise their voices. We must think of a pathway for making specialised teachers through our education system, including their career path.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, various innovations and initiatives were expected from the schools to continue education. The reality was that the schools, in general, and the teachers mainly, were much less active than they were supposed to be. Surprisingly, the nation, for the first time, observed that our school teachers cannot assign home tasks to their students. Their role was to carry the ministry-supplied assignments to the students. This may happen due to teachers' incapability or ministries' centralisation mentality. Supervision to ensure whether the students did the assignments themselves was lacking. Then came auto promotion policy bypassing all sorts of assessments. We saw teachers coping with these odds without raising any voices. The whole event went against upholding teachers' empowerment.

Then came the new curriculum framework, which had almost no role for teachers in its construction. The teachers started to raise their isolated voices when they saw the demand for their new and extended role in its implementation. Many of those were less constructive than required. However, the teachers were supposed to be the principal architects of the national curriculum framework and its implementation pathways. Now, the government has decided to return to the old curriculum, again with no role of the respective teachers in decision-making. There is a culture of not listening to teachers' voices or diminishing their roles in curriculum planning, student assessment or overall school system management.

Teacher harassment has become a common phenomenon after the formation of the interim government. Surprisingly, as a professional community, the teachers seem helpless in protecting themselves. In many cases, they harass each other. Instead of saving their colleagues, they become part of it.

Once, we had very active teacher unions at the school level. Their activities were often criticised as trade unionism because they mainly engaged with teachers' financial benefits. Although problems have not been fully solved, the remuneration package for the teachers has improved significantly. No changing role of the teacher unions is seen today. Instead, the teacher unions became invisible over time.

However, in many countries, especially developed ones, discipline-specific teacher unions exist even at the school level. Along with other issues, they look after the quality of their members and ensure ethical standards and professionalism. They provide training and research to improve teaching. Such a qualified union can raise constructive voices and contribute to designing curriculum, student assessment and education policy.

The time has come to redefine the role of our teachers. A new social contract is, therefore, needed to uplift their voices. An urgent need is quality teachers who can play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our education system. Their contribution would expedite the current reform process in which the nation is actively engaged.



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Towards a New Social Contract for Education: Valuing Teachers in Bangladesh

October 5, World Teachers' Day, is the occasion to honour the critical role teachers play in shaping education globally. This year's theme for World Teacher' Day is Valuing Teacher Voices: A New Social Contract for Education. For Bangladesh, a country grappling with a teacher shortage, this moment offers an opportunity for educational transformation by recognizing and appreciating the teacher's role amidst the impact of climate change, digital advancements, and rising inequalities.

The 2024 UNESCO and International Teacher Task Force (ITTF) Global Report highlights a severe shortage of qualified teachers, with high attrition rates worldwide. In Bangladesh, 1.3 million teachers serve 42.3 million learners across 160,165 formal educational institutions (BANBEIS, 2024). Overcrowded classrooms, especially in rural areas, have student-teacher ratios as high as 60:1, and in public colleges, this ratio rises to 97:1 (BANBEIS 2024). These conditions overwhelm educators and hinder meaningful and personalised instruction. Moreover, the shortage of subject-specific teachers, particularly in science, math and English language in secondary schools and colleges creates a huge obstacle to effective teaching and learning.

Recruitment challenges further compound the issue. Overlapping authorities like the Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA) and the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) cause delays, political interference and financial uncertainty. Rural areas suffer the most, with severe teacher shortages exacerbating educational disparities. Moreover, about only a third of teachers (35%) have some training in inclusive education, according to a 2023 UNICEF report, leaving many educators unprepared to support students with disabilities. Negative effects of other factors, such as gender, ethnicity, income disparity and remote locations of some schools have an impact on the performance of teachers.

Teachers' remuneration and income are another major concern. Government primary school teachers earn less than USD 200 per month and 56% of teachers consider themselves underpaid, which leads to high attrition. The situation is even worse for non-government school teachers. Only 30% of teachers in Bangladesh participated in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in 2023. Only one-third of teachers have received some form of gender-sensitive pedagogy training, despite the prevalence of patriarchal norms in society.

The impacts of climate change add further strain, particularly in regions like Char, Haor, and coastal areas. Extreme weather disrupts education, leading to increased absenteeism and making it harder for teachers to deliver quality lessons. Digital learning also remains a challenge. A 2022 BANBEIS survey revealed that only 20% of schools have adequate ICT facilities and just 23% of teachers have received formal training in educational technology, limiting digital tool integration, especially in rural areas. Bangladesh's education sector suffers from a disconnect between education and workforce

demands in the economy, fueling youth unemployment and contributing to psycho-social issues and political instability. Public education financing is another pressing issue, with Bangladesh allocating only around 2% of its GDP to education, far below the UNESCO-recommended 4-6%. This underfunding restricts resources, limits teacher recruitment, and diminishes teacher morale, with 45% of educators citing financial constraints as barriers to delivering quality education (Education Watch Report 2022). National education policies often do not take into account teacher inputs, thus diminishing professional autonomy and stifling innovation. The fragmentation of teachers' associations also weakens their voice. The top-down approach to decision-making leaves teachers with little say in matters that directly impact their classrooms, dignity and rights, leading to dissatisfaction and reduced motivation. Strengthening social dialogue, as recommended by the UN High-Level Panel, could help transform the education system by giving teachers a voice in policy decisions.

World Teachers' Day 2024 emphasises the need for a "new social contract for education," recognizing teachers as partners in vital decision-making. Social dialogue involving government officials, teachers and civil society is essential for improving working conditions and aligning these with the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers (1966, 1997). Teachers are critical agents of change, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when they were innovative and creative in keeping students engaged in learning with minimal support. Yet, they are often undervalued and not seen as education decision-makers, hindering meaningful change. A new social contract must include mechanisms for teachers to participate in policy discussions, allowing them to contribute to national strategies and tackle challenges like curriculum reform and improving access to education in remote areas.

To attract and retain talented educators, Bangladesh must invest in improving teachers' material conditions by offering competitive salaries, modern teaching resources, and reducing administrative burdens. Teachers must also have access to professional development, with teaching viewed as a lifelong journey of growth. Empowering teachers to engage in research and apply evidence-based practices will equip them to better meet students' evolving needs.

Teachers in Bangladesh also play a vital role as community developers, particularly in rural areas where schools often serve as community hubs. Involving teachers in local decision-making processes ensures that education aligns with the needs of the community, making it more relevant and effective. Consideration of critical strategic issues and development of guiding documents such as a strategic framework for SDG 4, a comprehensive education sector plan (ESP), a teachers' policy need policy-makers' attention. Setting up a permanent Education Commission could help systematically and sustainably address the important policy issues and priorities for educational transformation and let teachers be the pivot in transformation.

Reimagining the teaching profession and creating a new social contract for education requires collaboration, trust, and respect for teachers' autonomy. This contract must recognise their central role in shaping education and ensure their voices are heard in policymaking. By investing in teachers' professional development, working conditions, and fostering social dialogue, Bangladesh can build an inclusive and equitable education system that serves the needs of all its citizens.