

RESPECT THE TEACHERS

RESPECT THE FUTURE

On this World Teachers' Day, as we honour those who have lit our paths, we must remember that no nation or society can rise without the persistent labour of its teachers. Teaching is not simply the transfer of knowledge; it is the shaping of character, the sparking of curiosity and the building of resilience in the face of doubt. They stand as both architects and guardians of our future, moulding minds with patience and compassion. Respecting teachers is not about grand gestures; it is about recognising that their sacrifices -- long hours of dedication despite little pay -- form the foundation of our progress. Behind every discovery, invention, or act of leadership stands a teacher who nurtured the spark. As we celebrate this day, let us remind ourselves: respecting teachers means listening to their voices; valuing their wisdom; and standing up for their rights. A society that neglects its teachers writes its own decline, while one that honours them writes its renewal.



PRIMARY EDUCATION
(from pre-primary to Grade 5)
Institutions: **1,18,607**
Students: **20,183,048**
(girls: 51.17%)
Teachers: **7,07,216** (female: 61.8%)

MADRASA EDUCATION
(Ebtadayee and those attached to secondary madrasas)
Institutions: **12,819**
Students: **18,81,627** (girls: 48.95%)
Teachers: **50,663** (female: 25.9%)

SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION
Institutions: **18,968**
Students: **81,66,188** (girls: 55.05%)
Teachers: **2,46,784**
(female: 29.60%)

MADRASA EDUCATION
(secondary madrasas)
Institutions: **9,259**
Students: **27,58,504**
(girls: 53.68%)
Teachers: **1,18,280**
(female: 19.58%)

COLLEGE EDUCATION
Institutions: **3,341**
Students: **46,31,126** (girls: 50.47%)
Teachers: **1,11,327** (female: 24.38%)

SOURCE: BANBEIS, DPE

Architects of tomorrow overlooked today

Primary school teachers trapped in debt and disrespect

WASIM BIN HABIB

They carry the nation's most vital responsibility: shaping young minds and laying the foundation for future generations.

Yet, primary school teachers in Bangladesh struggle to build dignified lives of their own, weighed down by meagre pay and a persistent lack of social recognition -- a reality that not only affects their livelihoods but also undermines the quality of education.

Paid under the National Pay Scale 2015, with no adjustments for surging inflation, teachers say their salaries barely support their families. With inflation now at 8.29 percent, the cost of food, transport, and healthcare has steadily climbed, but their pay has failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

"Every month is a struggle. My salary vanishes within 15 days after covering just the basics like rent, food, and my children's education," said Khairun Nahar Lipi, an assistant teacher at Mohammadpur Government Primary School in Dhaka.

Currently, an assistant teacher at a government primary school starts with a basic salary of Tk 11,000 under grade I3, while head teachers begin at Tk 11,300 under grade I2. Trained head teachers receive a higher starting salary of Tk 12,500 under grade II.

In addition, they receive a house rent allowance -- ranging from 45 to 60 percent of the basic depending on the institution's location -- along with Tk 1,500 for medical expenses, Tk 300 as convenience, and a tiffin allowance of just Tk 200.

Many of her colleagues, Lipi said, are forced to take out loans almost every month just to cover basic expenses. Even a government primary school teacher in Joypurhat's Kalai upazila died by suicide last month, unable to cope with the mounting burden of debt.

"Can you understand our situation? We are a big stakeholder in education, but no one hardly cares about us -- our pain, our agonies," she said.

Adding to their frustration is the lack of social and professional status. Educators, especially the assistant teachers, are broadly



A government primary school teacher during a protest in the capital's Shahbagh earlier this year.

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

classified as third-class employees in the pay structure and often placed on the same grade as clerical staff -- nowhere near bankers or doctors and engineers in terms of respect, status, or pay.

In state-run banks, entry-level positions such as Officer and Senior Officer are placed under the 10th and 9th grades of the national pay scale, with starting salaries of Tk 16,000 and Tk 22,000 respectively. In addition to it, they also get house rent, medical and other allowances.

"Teachers help build the foundation of the very doctors and engineers this nation relies on, yet we're rarely seen in the same light," said Lipi, general secretary of the Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association.

The low pay and declining social status are not personal struggles; they're also changing the future of the profession. Many young, talented graduates are no longer choosing teaching as a first option, while others see it as a temporary job until something better comes along.

"How can we expect meritorious students to become primary school teachers with this salary structure and social status?" Manzur Rahman, a teacher of 19-No Raripara Government Primary School in Kumira of Satkhira.

"Teachers are popularly dubbed as the architects of the nation, but, I think, we are the most overlooked segment of the workforce. Bright students will never choose

teaching; they would go for careers that offer better financial security and greater respect," he said.

Educators say their remuneration left them with little choice but to take on private tuitions, coaching centers or other jobs after school hours. Many spend evenings tutoring students just to cover the ever-increasing costs. The extra workload affects their classroom performance and eventually undermines the quality of classroom teaching, they add.

"I teach all day and tutor in the evenings just to keep my family surviving. There's hardly any time to rest, no time for family. It's exhausting, but I have no choice," said a teacher in a state-run school in Dhaka, wishing not to be named.

‘Without respect for teachers, education loses its value’

Dhaka University Prof Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury says the ruling class has persistently neglected education, and when education is devalued, teachers inevitably lose social dignity. On the occasion of World Teachers' Day,

The Daily Star spoke with one of the country's most esteemed educators about the declining social and financial recognition of teachers and the way forward.

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Daily Star (TDS): On the eve of World Teachers' Day, as we honour educators around the globe, how would you evaluate the current social and economic status of teachers in Bangladesh?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: This is a vital question. Issues surrounding the status of teachers have long existed, but the situation has worsened. Both their societal standing and financial security have declined. Education itself no longer holds the same social or national importance it once did.

Bangladesh is a bureaucratic capitalist state. Within this system, bureaucrats enjoy respect that teachers do not receive. When a teacher attends an event, it is common for their presence to go unnoticed. Economically, teachers are in a vulnerable position, reflected in their pay scales.

Consequently, many rely on private tuition and coaching centres. Often, a teacher must give private lessons in the morning, teach at school during the day, and then head to a coaching centre in the evening. This divided attention undermines classroom teaching.

It is essential that education be delivered in the classroom so effectively that students do not need additional study at home. But if teachers cannot concentrate fully in class, they cannot fulfil their role as true educators. **TDS:** You mentioned that teachers once held a reasonably good status. What led to the decline we see today?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: The ruling class never gave education the importance it



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

deserved. The government's primary focus was on ruling, not on ensuring people became educated or that basic education was widely accessible. Their aim was to govern, not to empower.

Even in development efforts, education was sidelined. When education is not valued, teachers are also denied respect. Our development is of a capitalist nature. What does this development do? It creates disparity, prioritises profit, and reduces the value of education.

Teachers see that they need economic improvement, so their focus shifts towards earning through coaching and tuition, which in turn affects their social standing.

TDS: Doesn't a teacher's pursuit of private tuition, coaching centres, or paying money to secure a job raise questions about their dignity?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: Definitely. A teacher pays money to get the job, and then seeks to earn it back. Another factor is competition.

Previously, people were content within their profession. Now universal competition is required. If my neighbour achieves greater development than I do, my status decreases even within my own family.

TDS: You mentioned this issue stems from the capitalist model of development. But in other capitalist countries, teachers receive decent salaries and are held in high regard. How do they manage this, and why haven't we?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: There is a fundamental difference between the capitalist systems of other countries and the bourgeois structure here. In many capitalist nations, development was driven by skill acquisition and knowledge.

They understood that knowledge was strategic not only for progress but also for colonial dominance. From weapons to trade and commerce, every domain demanded skill, and skill required education. For education to thrive, teachers had to be respected. Their dignity, status, and economic security were vital. These countries deliberately attracted talented people into teaching by offering competitive salaries and elevating the profession's social standing. Capitalists usually acquired resources from other countries, but in our country, it is opposite where wealth is being laundered abroad. In Bangladesh, patriotism in development has steadily declined.

TDS: Are the salary, honour, and security

currently provided to teachers in Bangladesh adequate?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: No. Teachers, especially at primary and secondary levels, are often forced to take to the streets, face repression, and endure assault. Such scenes do not enhance their image.

Another harmful factor is our three-stream education system. General, madrasa, and English-medium streams existed during the Pakistan period but have now expanded, intensifying class-based segregation. The dream of a unified, inclusive system rooted in the mother tongue was never realised.

For instance, English-medium students often struggle to get into public universities because their syllabus is misaligned with admission tests. Naturally, many go abroad, fuelling brain drain.

TDS: Recently, teachers have been harassed in various ways, including being forced to resign. What is your take on the issue?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: If a teacher is humiliated, the entire education system is humiliated. Publicly humiliating a teacher for political reasons or by organising students is a major crime. This injustice is highly detrimental to public confidence, attraction, and status regarding education.

TDS: Teachers' low salaries push them to seek extra income, fuelling commercialisation. What is the solution?

Serajul Islam Choudhury: The solution is raising teachers' status, salaries, and allowances.

FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE