The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

End the black market in child adoption

A civil legal framework for adoption needed to prevent scams, irregularities

Most countries have some legal mechanism for determining who may raise another person's child. Bangladesh, however, has a legal vacuum in this area, with no civil statute clearly governing adoption. This coupled with the fact that many childless couples look for alternative options through unsupervised digital platforms have helped create fertile ground for a black market in children. A recent report by *Prothom Alo* found 39 such public groups on Facebook and scrutinised 288 posts. However, the child trade extends well beyond social media. A woman broker admitted that she and her associates find pregnant women in hospitals who do not want to keep their babies, and then have a network look after them until they give birth. A newborn boy costs Tk 300,000; a girl Tk 200,000.

Not every seller is a seller. Some mothers are desperate, abandoned by husbands and unable to feed another mouth. Some are members of scam rings. One man from Kushtia, for example, lost Tk 10,000 to a "mother" who showed him a baby on a video call, took his advance by mobile money, and vanished along with her group. Law enforcement currently remains too lax to stop such scams and irregularities. In Bangladesh, the penal code punishes selling or buying a child for immoral or illegal purposes. The new law on human trafficking counts adoption in bad faith as exploitation. Yet police say they have received no complaint specifically about child-selling. Nobody complains, of course, when the buyer and the seller are willing parties. Nobody tracks where these children end up: in loving homes, in domestic servitude, or in worse places.

Meta, which owns Facebook, cannot be let off the hook for the digital scams underway. Its own rules forbid content that facilitates the sale of children or illegal adoption, yet the groups *Prothom Alo* found are public and searchable. Meta profits from the attention that such groups attract. Bangladesh's regulators should therefore demand that Meta remove the groups, act on report findings promptly, and cooperate with investigations. At the same time, law enforcement agencies must crack down on the black market where the price of a child is set by just a few clicks and a mobile-money transfer. The government must bring the whole situation under control, making sure that the criminals, once targeted, do not simply retreat into encrypted apps to continue the trade through another platform.

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Bangladesh should also consider a civil legal framework for child adoption for people of all faiths, with proper court oversight, screening of adopters, and a national registry that follows each child. Many childless couples badly want a family and they need proper and safe options. The authorities should help open a lawful, supervised route for them. That will shelter many vulnerable children and also shrink the market that now preys on the desperation of people.

Syndicates mustn't control slum utilities

Why should slum dwellers pay a 'premium' for essential services?

It is deeply troubling that many residents of Dhaka's informal settlements remain at the mercy of syndicates controlling basic amenities such as electricity, water, and gas, forcing low-income households to pay significantly more than they should. A recent report by this daily, based on interviews with around 50 residents of Korail, Bhashantek, and Kalyanpur Pora Basti between May and July, found that many lack the documents required for individual connections. So, they depend on shared-meter arrangements involving NGOs or other authorised intermediaries. However, syndicates, often with political backing, take unauthorised control of the meters and exploit residents.

One of the residents of Korail pays Tk 600 a month for a light and a fan, despite estimated usage costing less than Tk 450. Among the few main electricity meters that cater to around 17,000 households in Korail, many are controlled by people with political affiliation. One such person charges sub-meter users Tk 13 per unit, but he, himself pays Tk 7.47 per unit to Desco. Another informal provider, also the joint convener of BNP's Banani Thana Mahila Dal, defended the extra charge as a service fee for maintenance and customer support. Residents of another slum under Dhaka North, Kalyanpur Pora Basti, said they get charged between Tk 15 and Tk 18 per unit of electricity.

The situation is dire even for gas connections and water supplies. Many Korail residents pay Tk 500–600 for a single burner and Tk 1,000–1,200 for a double burner, while paying Tk 300–400 for water regardless of usage, far above Wasa's official tariff. Meanwhile, Titas lacks the manpower to adequately monitor illegal connections, allowing syndicates to repeatedly reconnect lines and maintain their grip over supplies. The relevant authorities at Desco, Dhaka North, Wasa, and Titas Gas are aware of the illegal connections; however, they appear to lack a plan to tackle the situation, leaving the residents highly vulnerable.

We, therefore, urge the authorities to move beyond sporadic enforcement and develop a coordinated policy to formalise utility access in informal settlements. Individual connections should be facilitated where possible, while regulated shared connections can provide an interim solution. Meanwhile, we urge the government to ensure access to basic amenities for these communities. Our most vulnerable citizens must not bear the brunt of weak governance.

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Teachers must be the pivot of change in our education system



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■ **MANZOOR AHMED**

The theme for World Teachers' Day 2026 is "Standing with teachers: 60 years of protecting the profession, advancing its status and shaping our futures." It has been six decades since UNESCO and the ILO adopted the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers in 1966, and this year's teachers' day theme provides an opportunity to reflect on the challenges facing teachers and the teaching profession—an issue that resonates particularly in Bangladesh. Since its independence, the country has struggled to define and enhance the role of teachers in building an education system that is equitable, inclusive, and of acceptable quality.

Ensuring enough teachers with the required skills and motivation has become a global challenge with burgeoning educational expectations and demands since the launch of the Education for All movement in the 1990s. Unesco estimates that at least 44 million teachers worldwide must be added to the 94 million current teachers to meet the requirements of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) by 2030. The global teacher crisis prompted the convening of the first World Summit on Teachers in Chile in August 2025, which highlighted how a lack of trained teachers disproportionately impacted low-income countries, especially the rural, remote, and marginalised communities.

The core recommendations of the summit included: i) preserving dignity in teachers' work conditions with governments guaranteeing job security, fair and competitive salaries, realistic workloads, and support for teacher well-being; ii) sustainable financing by prioritising education in national budgets and establishing legal minimum allocations, backed by coordinated international donor support; iii) professionalisation and training by strengthening initial teacher preparation, continuous professional development, and specialised digital and AI competencies; iv) social dialogue within countries by teachers and their unions directly participating in national policy design and decision-making processes; and formally recognising teacher-student relationship as part of common cultural and human heritage; and v) strong accountability through tracking progress transparently via national monitoring mechanisms, etc.

To apply the general guideline for improving teacher performance and status as reflected in the Santiago Consensus, countries must adapt these broad principles to their specific circumstances. In Bangladesh, two consultation committees appointed under the interim government to recommend reforms in primary and secondary education devoted a chapter on teachers in their two reports.

There, a lack of a clearly defined framework for teachers' responsibility, effort, and performance standards at both primary and secondary levels was found. Not enough teachers are on the payroll or deployed to maintain a reasonable class size in schools. Shortage of subject teachers for core subjects is a particularly serious shortcoming in secondary schools. Teaching personnel management, including recruitment, placement, transfer, and promotion, is a source of inefficiency, corruption and huge discontent among teachers. Pre-service professional preparation, in-service professional support, and a culture of mentoring new school teachers are largely absent or ineffective. A reliable career path for teachers is virtually non-existent.

Both consultation committees recommended ways to strengthen teachers' role, performance and status, including early and medium-term actions, essentially within the existing structure of teaching personnel management. They also proposed a longer-term view to bring about a transformative change in how teachers perform and perceive themselves and how society perceives and values teachers, so that the "best and the brightest" are attracted to the profession.

In this connection, it's worth mentioning the BNP government reform initiative called Bangladesh NextGen Overhaul. Developed with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Partnership Compact, it ambitiously aims to "transform teacher professionalisation for effective teaching towards enhanced learning outcomes." The Partnership Compact will be funded, in addition to government funds, by a $48.8 million System Transformation Grant from GPE with an additional $350 million package of an Asian Development Bank concessional loan and GPE grant.

The "key transformative pillars" of the initiative are indicated as: a) Blended Learning and Technology Deployment providing training to 7,00,000 teachers nationwide in digital delivery tools and modern pedagogical techniques; b) System Synergy and Transition Rates, in which success will be measured by the rate of students transitioning from primary to secondary school and the boost in secondary completion rates; and c) Long-Term Funding Commitment from Bangladesh government to scale up public education spending progressively from under 2 percent of GDP toward a 5 percent GDP target.

The partnership compact focusing on change in teachers' role and performance—aiming at a policy shift, mobilising domestic and external funding, and assessing measurable progress—is commendable but, in the past, such initiatives faltered and promises remained unfulfilled. This raises the question: does the new initiative rely on a technocratic formula ignoring political and cultural barriers, system capacity, work ethic and accountability deficits?

The "teacher professionalisation" relies heavily on standardised, metrics-driven outputs, such as training 70,0,000 teachers and deploying digital learning infrastructure. These quantifiable metrics are necessary, but does leaning on them risk treating systemic issues as mere logistics while glossing over deep-seated cultural, political, and institutional deficits? It can be justifiably argued that a primary vulnerability of the GPE model is its assumption that training activities translate directly into classroom performance.

Besides, a technocratic formula assumes that teacher recruitment and professionalisation operate within a meritocratic system. However, our education policy and practices are deeply intertwined with local political economy. The NextGen overhaul mandates massive digital and blended-learning transformations across tens of thousands of primary and secondary schools. Does this overlook severe disparities in basic system capacity?



Bangladesh has the lowest school teachers' salaries in South Asia—50 percent lower than in India and 30 percent lower than in Pakistan.

FILE PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

In secondary schools, only government teachers (3 percent of the total) are placed at the government salary level of grade 10 (out of 20 civil service grades). The MPO-listed teachers (97 percent of secondary teachers) receive the basic salary and about a quarter of the benefits paid to government teachers. Non-MPO teachers, paid from the school's own funds, receive substantially less. Meanwhile, government primary school teachers are employed at grade 13, which is traditionally classified as a third-class government job. Majority of primary-level institutions and teachers are non-government, with no salary regulations.

In fact, Bangladesh school teachers' salary is the lowest in South Asia. The average teacher salary is 50 percent higher in India and 30 percent in Pakistan. Besides, teachers' professional organisations, often linked with political parties, mostly bargain for material gains with little discussion on system performance.

Is the economic reality of the teaching profession being overlooked? How will the perception change that school teaching is a low-status, underpaid civil service track, not attractive to top-tier graduates? How can the economic cycle that drives the private coaching market be broken?

While this initiative provides an infusion of resources and focuses on teachers' issues, its success clearly hinges on whether the government can execute structural anti-corruption and civil service reforms. Without breaking the underlying political and institutional patterns, the initiative risks operating as an expensive and dysfunctional technical solution to what is essentially a deeply political problem. It also neglects a longer-term transformative rethinking of the teaching profession emphasised in the two consultation committee reports.

Teaching is serious business. It takes commitment, not just expertise



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■ **SHAFIQ R BHUIYAN**

In the movie *3 Idiots*, Rancho (played by Aamir Khan) walks into a classroom and does something that irritates his professor: he shows how to teach. The professor knows engineering, but Rancho challenges him on how to make students understand. This memorable scene renders a distinctive message: knowing a subject and knowing how to teach it are not the same.

Every October 5, World Teachers' Day reminds us to celebrate those who shape how children think, learn, and see the world. We call them nation-builders and guardians of the future. But perhaps the occasion also invites a fundamental question: Is being a good student enough to become a good teacher?

Someone who has mastered a subject, performed well in examinations, and demonstrated discipline seems an obvious candidate to teach it. Yet the skills that make someone a successful learner are not the same as those that make someone an effective teacher. A good teacher must do more than show they know the answer. They must work out why a student does not know it.

Consider a simple math lesson. A teacher may know exactly how to solve an equation, but when a student cannot, the teacher has to diagnose the problem. Has the student misunderstood the concept? Missed something in an earlier lesson? Found the explanation too abstract? Lost confidence? The teacher must adapt the approach to suit the learner. This ability is called pedagogical knowledge. Growing evidence shows it matters.

A 2026 OECD Teacher Knowledge Survey, involving more than 20,000 lower-secondary teachers across eight countries, found that countries where teachers scored higher in general pedagogical knowledge also tended to have better mathematics results among 15-year-old students. The OECD says this knowledge helps teachers create effective learning environments and use classroom time more effectively.

The finding is consistent with an earlier OECD systematic review of international research involving more than 10,000 teachers and 850,000 students across 21 countries. Its meta-analysis found significant effects of general pedagogical knowledge on teaching quality and student outcomes. It concluded that teaching requires not only knowledge but also the skills and practical experience needed to translate that knowledge into classroom practice. This is why some education systems treat teaching as a profession requiring specialised preparation, rather than assuming that subject expertise will automatically translate into teaching ability.

Singapore provides one example. At the National Institute of Education, teacher preparation includes teaching practice under experienced teachers and university supervisors. Trainee teachers progressively develop lesson planning, delivery, classroom management and assessment skills. The practicum is not an optional add-on; it is integral to becoming a teacher.

Finland takes a different route but follows a similar principle. For a qualified class teacher, Finland generally requires a master's-level education together with multidisciplinary studies and teachers' pedagogical studies. Subject teachers also require a master's degree, studies in the teaching subject and pedagogical studies. In other words, knowing the subject is one component of becoming qualified to teach it.

Neither country offers a model that Bangladesh can copy. Their education systems, resources, and social contexts differ. Yet both illustrate a principle worth considering: teaching ability must be developed, practised, and assessed.

Bangladesh can apply that principle without reinventing its education system. Academic qualifications should remain important in teacher recruitment, but they need not be the sole criterion of suitability. Demonstration classes, supervised teaching practice, and structured feedback could help assess whether a candidate can explain a concept, engage learners, and respond to diverse classroom situations.

Professional development matters just as much. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their practice, learn new methods, and understand how different students learn. This matters even more in an age when information is instantly available. A student can now find an explanation, definition or formula on a phone within seconds. The teacher's value increasingly lies not simply in possessing information, but in helping students understand, question, connect, and use it.

That is perhaps the lesson hidden in *3 Idiots*. Rancho is not necessarily demonstrating that he knows more engineering than his professor. He is showing that knowing something and communicating it effectively are distinct abilities. The film makes the point dramatically; educational research gives it substance.

On World Teachers' Day, the most meaningful way to honour teachers may be to take teaching seriously: select people not just for what they once achieved as students, prepare them to teach, give them opportunities to practise, and continue developing them throughout their careers. A good student knows how to learn; a good teacher must also know how to make learning happen for someone else.

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