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Restore teachers' status and dignity

This cannot be achieved without decent pay for them

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's strong assertion that the dignity of teachers in society is closely linked to the dignity and image of the state is undoubtedly a welcome and encouraging statement. Marking World Teachers' Day on October 5, the PM stressed the need to make teaching an attractive and competitive profession so the most talented people opt for it as their first career. We laud him for his statement, which came after this daily reported in detail how the teaching profession has remained undervalued for a long time.

According to the report, primary teachers are often placed in the same pay grade (Grade 13) as drivers, clerks, and stenographers even though they require higher academic qualifications to enter the profession. Citing a recruitment advertisement for a technician in Grade 13, the report noted that anyone with SSC and HSC certificates is eligible to apply, whereas the minimum qualification for an assistant primary teacher is a bachelor's degree.

Another report published on the same day quoted officials from the finance ministry as saying that the recent pay hike for civil servants, effective from July this year, will not immediately be available to teachers under the Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme, the system through which basic salaries and portions of allowances are paid to teachers at approved educational institutions. According to the officials, the delay is because payments under the MPO system are still processed manually, while the salaries of civil servants are managed through centralised digital software. Government employees are set to receive the higher salaries, including arrears dating back to July, with this month's pay.

Quality recruitment, appropriate training, and decent and attractive pay structures are essential to improving the quality of education and raising it to global standards.

This is yet another instance of the neglect that teachers—and ultimately the education system—receive in the state's policy-making priorities. These disparities must be removed as soon as possible if the government genuinely wants to make teaching an attractive profession again. Dignity without decent pay is merely wishful thinking.

The neglect of teachers extends beyond pay disparities. They also face very limited promotion opportunities and the absence of a clear career progression path. An expert committee under the interim government proposed abolishing the post of assistant teacher and recruiting new teachers at Grade 12. They would be confirmed after two years and promoted to senior teachers in Grade 11 after another two years. Headteachers would be placed in Grade 10. The government should urgently consider these recommendations. Quality recruitment, appropriate training, and decent and attractive pay structures are essential to improving the quality of education and raising it to global standards. Without providing teachers with adequate financial support and removing existing disparities with equivalent professions, any statement about restoring their dignity will become another rhetoric.

Rein in the resort boom

Protect Sundarbans, other ecologically critical areas from unchecked resort development

The growing resort business around the Sundarbans, with little regard for its fragile ecosystem, is deeply worrying. Over the past seven or eight years, at least 21 resorts and cottages have sprung up along the forest in Khulna and Satkhira, while another 10 are reportedly being built. Concrete structures are being built by cutting trees and filling wetlands, while loud music, barbecue parties and uncontrolled tourist movement are disrupting the forest's environment—all in areas where commercial construction is legally restricted.

The Sundarbans and its surrounding area were declared an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) in 1999, covering 10 kilometres from the forest boundary. However, none of the resorts reportedly obtained the necessary environmental clearance or registration from the district administration. Around 10 resorts have been built beside the Dhangmari canal, a declared dolphin sanctuary where endangered Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins are found. Tourist boats regularly use the canal, often without permission, while noise, bright lights, and waste from the resorts are affecting the surrounding ecosystem. Some resorts reportedly continue to operate and take tourists inside the forest even when entry is prohibited during the June-August period.

The problem is not confined to the Sundarbans alone. In Bandarban, numerous resorts and cottages have been built by cutting hills and trees, while natural streams are reportedly being obstructed and water bodies polluted by plastic and untreated waste. The situation in Saint Martin's is equally worrying. Despite being declared an ECA in 1999 and restrictions on construction, new resorts and cottages are reportedly being built by clearing keya forests, cutting coconut trees and using sand and limestone taken from the beach. And in Sonadia, after nearly 9,000 acres of forest land were allocated to the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) in 2017 for an ecotourism park, large-scale clearing of the island's mangrove forest began. Between 2017 and 2025, at least 6,000 acres were cleared for building shrimp enclosures. Such activities cannot continue.

We, however, welcome the Department of Environment's recent order to stop the operation of 18 resorts around the Sundarbans and hope its directive will be enforced fully and without exception. The DoE has also warned of conducting mobile court operations in the areas. But clearly, eviction alone will not restore the forest ecosystem. The mangroves must be restored, natural tidal flows brought back and effective monitoring put in place to prevent renewed encroachment. The government must also take action against resort developers, irrespective of their political affiliation. More importantly, the government must establish and enforce clear rules for tourism in ecologically critical areas. It must act now to protect the Sundarbans, Bandarban, Saint Martin's and other fragile ecosystems from the unchecked resort boom.

The cost of leaving the LPG market to private control



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■ KALLOL MUSTAFA

While the country's LPG market is experiencing turmoil, the market in neighbouring India remains relatively stable. Consumers there can obtain LPG cylinders on time at government-fixed prices, delivered to their homes.

Since the war began in the Middle East, India has raised the price of domestic LPG—used in households—twice. The first increase, in March, was by 60 rupees, equivalent to Tk 77, and the second, in June, was 29 rupees, or Tk 37—a total increase of 89 rupees or Tk 114 since the war began.

The price of a 14.2kg domestic LPG cylinder in India now stands at 942 rupees, or Tk 1,205, and it has not been increased since June. Based on this price, a 12kg cylinder—the type used in Bangladesh—would cost 796 rupees, or Tk 1,015, in India. Compared to this, the government-fixed price of LPG in Bangladesh, even before the war, was higher: a 12kg cylinder cost Tk 1,341. In reality, however, consumers often had to pay even more.

After the war began, Bangladesh raised the LPG price by a total of Tk 599 in two rounds in April. After several subsequent increases and reductions, the official price eventually reached Tk 1,837. But in reality, consumers are buying LPG from the market at much higher prices.

The war in the Middle East is the same, but its impact on ordinary people in the two countries differs greatly. The reason for this difference lies in the contrasting structures and management of the two markets.

In Bangladesh, the LPG sector is almost entirely dependent on a handful of private companies, over which the government has little effective control. Rather, these companies appear to exercise considerable influence over the government. Whenever they create an artificial shortage, the government ends up raising LPG prices.

The same allegation has been raised over the latest price increase. The LPG Traders' Cooperative Association says LPG-importing companies began reducing supplies to the market from September 20. Initially, supply was cut by 30 percent; later, it exceeded 50 percent, creating the LPG shortage in the market.

Surprisingly, LPG imports into Bangladesh did not decline drastically. The country imported 1,58,000 metric tonnes of LPG in August and another 1,56,000 tonnes in September. This raises the obvious question: why did market supply decline? Unless LPG was being stockpiled, there should have been no reason for market supply to fall.

India, by contrast, has an LPG market controlled almost entirely by three state-owned companies: HP Gas, Indane Gas, and Bharat Gas. Through these companies, the Indian government imports LPG and sells it at regulated prices through designated dealers. Consumers book LPG through mobile apps, telephone, or SMS. Dealers then deliver the cylinders to consumers' addresses at the fixed price, with no additional delivery charge. The delivery charge is included in the LPG price. A consumer can purchase one 14.2kg LPG cylinder per month at the government-fixed price of 942 rupees. If more LPG is required, additional cylinders have to be purchased at comparatively higher market prices.

To prevent cylinders from being diverted and sold at inflated prices on the black market, the government uses a Delivery Authentication Code (DAC) system. When a consumer books an LPG cylinder, an OTP or DAC is sent to their registered mobile number. The delivery can be marked as complete only after the consumer receives the cylinder and shares the code with the delivery worker. This makes it difficult for dealers to charge above the fixed price or divert cylinders elsewhere.

For years, people in Bangladesh have been suffering from a shortage of cooking fuel because of the country's natural gas crisis. Ensuring the availability of LPG at affordable prices, safely and reliably, could have been a solution. Clearly, this solution cannot be achieved by leaving the LPG market entirely in the private companies' hands. Bangladesh could adopt India's approach of ensuring LPG sale at regulated prices through state-owned companies. At the same time, the government must regularly monitor and oversee private companies' LPG imports, storage and supply to ensure sale at government-fixed prices and to prevent artificial shortages.

Unless proper regulation and state intervention curb private companies' monopolistic dominance over the LPG market, the current chaos will continue.



The LPG market has been unstable for nearly two weeks, and many consumers have not been able to buy LPG cylinders even after agreeing to pay higher than the government-fixed price. FILE PHOTO: STAR

Forcing consumers to pay higher prices for an essential commodity by reducing supply and creating an artificial shortage in the market, to which the government subsequently responds by formally raising the commodity's price, is a known tactic that was used repeatedly—be it for soybean oil, sugar or LPG—under the Awami League government. It was not expected under an elected government that came to power with a huge mandate. Rather, people hoped that essential commodity markets would be free from the monopolistic control of business syndicates. But the recent price hike of LPG indicates otherwise.

The LPG market has been unstable for nearly two weeks: 12kg LPG cylinders were being sold for Tk 400-900 more than the government-fixed price. In some places, consumers could not buy LPG cylinders even after agreeing to pay higher prices.

Against this backdrop, the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), from the evening of October 4, raised the price of a 12kg LPG cylinder in the private sector by Tk 252 to Tk 1,837, and that of autogas (LPG used in vehicles) to Tk 84.62 per litre from Tk 73.09. BERC cited higher international prices of propane and butane, the two main components of LPG, as well as increased shipping costs to justify the hike. Since the increase was imposed unilaterally without any public hearing, how accurately it reflects the rise in international prices remains a question.

The LPG price hike comes at a time when Bangladesh has already been suffering from prolonged high inflation—the highest in South Asia. Just two weeks ago, on September 21, a fuel price hike pushed up the prices of essential commodities further.

Nearly one crore consumers use LPG as fuel in the country. Around 80 percent of it is used for cooking, while the rest is consumed by industry and transport. The sharp increase in LPG prices will directly raise household cooking costs and increase the operating costs in the transport and industrial sectors that use LPG.

WORLD COTTON DAY

Can cotton diplomacy raise RMG prospects?



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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

■ IFTEKHAR UL KARIM

From Eli Whitney's cotton gin, which transformed American cotton production and fuelled the expansion of slavery, to a cotton-related claim brought to Abraham Lincoln's attention on the evening of his assassination, the fibre remained deeply intertwined with America's economic history. Across the Atlantic, Bengal transformed cotton, derived from the Arabic qutn, into the legendary Dhaka muslin, coveted worldwide, before colonial rule hastened its decline. Today, Bangladesh has re-emerged as a global textile powerhouse and remains among the world's largest cotton importers. From producing its own celebrated cotton textiles to sourcing fibre from across the world, Bangladesh's evolving textile economy is opening new avenues for trade, innovation, and economic diplomacy.

The emerging relationship with the US illustrates how cotton is becoming more than a raw material. The cotton clause in the Bangladesh-US trade pact links potential preferential tariff treatment for certain Bangladeshi apparel exports to purchases of American cotton and textile inputs. While this creates opportunities for deeper cooperation, its commercial benefits will depend on sourcing costs, eligibility requirements, and implementation. Cotton diplomacy must therefore translate into measurable advantages for manufacturers rather than simply increasing import commitments.

The launch of CottonPort, Bangladesh's first digital raw-cotton marketplace, marks a tangible step forward. With an initial offering of 82 tonnes of Virginia cotton, the platform seeks to connect American suppliers directly with Bangladeshi spinning mills, improving pricing transparency and traceability. A planned private warehouse in Chattogram could further accelerate deliveries and reduce procurement uncertainty. Together, these initiatives demonstrate how international cooperation can evolve beyond trade agreements into practical improvements in supply-chain efficiency.

Bangladesh's engagement with Brazil adds another dimension to this emerging cotton diplomacy. Its pursuit of preferential market access for garments made with Brazilian cotton extends the relationship beyond Washington. Such partnerships could transform raw-material procurement into wider export opportunities while preserving diversified sourcing options.

Cotton traceability is becoming increasingly important as global buyers demand greater sourcing transparency. The US restrictions on products linked to forced labour in Xinjiang underscore the importance of verifying fibre origins. Integrating credible traceability systems across spinning, weaving and garment manufacturing could help exporters meet evolving buyer requirements. Cotton diplomacy must therefore extend beyond preferential tariffs to build the transparency, trust, and market confidence essential for long-term competitiveness.

While Bangladesh is strengthening its international cotton partnerships, disagreements over yarn imports continue to challenge its domestic textile industry. The government's recent decision to suspend the withdrawal of bonded import facilities for 10-30 count cotton yarn followed competing concerns from spinning mills and garment exporters. Domestic millers argue that unrestricted imports undermine local investment and employment, while apparel manufacturers caution that sourcing restrictions could increase costs and weaken export competitiveness. The disagreement underscores the need to strengthen domestic spinning capacity without compromising manufacturers' access to competitively priced inputs.

Energy reliability presents another challenge that cotton diplomacy alone cannot resolve. Energy shortages have constrained textile production and cotton demand, and the US Department of Agriculture has revised Bangladesh's cotton import and consumption forecasts downwards. Even favourable sourcing arrangements cannot deliver their full benefits when factories face operational disruptions. Reliable energy, efficient logistics and predictable policies must therefore accompany international partnerships to translate cotton imports into export earnings.

Bangladesh is also rediscovering its agricultural potential. A long-term roadmap targets domestic production of 1.9 million cotton bales annually by 2050, supported by improved varieties, research, financing and cultivation in suitable regions. Although domestic production cannot entirely replace imports, it could diversify supply, support rural livelihoods, and reconnect Bangladesh's textile industry with its agricultural heritage. Such expansion must remain commercially viable and environmentally responsible, particularly where cotton cultivation competes with food production or limited water resources.

The future of textiles, however, will not be written in cotton alone. According to the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), synthetic fibres accounted for 71.7 percent of global fibre demand in 2025, underscoring the importance of product diversification. Bangladeshi brand Illiyeen's development of CottoCool, a cotton-based fabric designed for the country's climate, illustrates how material innovation can respond to consumer needs. Such initiatives demonstrate opportunities to move beyond conventional apparel manufacturing towards functional fabrics, specialised textiles and higher-value products that strengthen Bangladesh's competitive position.

Sustainability offers an opportunity to reshape the industry. Advances in cotton recycling and dye-removal technologies could help recover valuable fibres from textile waste, reducing resource consumption and creating new sources of raw materials. Bangladesh's indigenous jute industry provides an alternative pathway towards diversified materials, blended textiles and higher-value applications. Combining cotton, jute, recycled fibres and man-made materials could help Bangladesh build a more innovative and resilient textile economy while responding to changing global demand and sustainability expectations.

From Lincoln's America to Bengal's muslin looms, cotton has long connected economic fortunes with wider historical transformations. Today, Bangladesh stands at another such intersection, linking American and Brazilian cotton fields with domestic farmers, spinning mills, garment factories, and emerging technologies. The opportunity is to ensure that these connections reinforce one another through competitive sourcing, reliable infrastructure, stronger domestic capabilities, and diversified products. On World Cotton Day, Bangladesh can look beyond cotton imports and build stronger partnerships that support its farmers, strengthen its textile industry, and create greater value at home.

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