

## Re-examining the Examination System

*Imagination is more important than knowledge*  
— Albert Einstein

### BCS Examination: An Appraisal

by Sharif Atiqur Rahman

IT is a job where one will be termed as a "servant", but with a scope to act like a true "master". It is a job where you will have a rare combination of power and respect. Here one can earn decently to maintain an honest, normal life. Yes, that is government service. I am talking about.

In this country with the world's ninth largest population, every year thousands of young men and women complete their university level education. But having a graduate or post-graduate degree does not ensure one a decent, respectable job. The person just qualifies to join the already existing millions who are desperately looking for a suitable job. A million of applications against ten posts - this is not a fairy tale figure, it is sheer reality! In a place like this, where a decent job seems to be very far from reality, getting employed as a "first class government servant" is literally like a dream come true. To be a government service holder, academic qualifications are not enough. This will only determine whether one is qualified to apply for it or not. Then through a competitive examination, these qualified applicants have to prove their merit, intelligence and efficiency to attain the responsibility of representing the government in various sectors or services. The examination is directed to choose the fittest person for first class government posts and thus ensuring

the smooth and efficient functioning of the government service. This competitive examination is known as the Bangladesh Civil Service examination (for BCS exam).

As it is the constitutional right of every citizen to get equal opportunity in getting employed in the government service, and as at the same time millions of qualified unemployed are hoping for such a job, it is expected that these BCS examinations are conducted with the best possible fairness and ensure equal opportunity for all the qualified applicants. But it has been observed that there are some gaps and lapses in this examination system which needs to be taken care of.

#### PSC & BCS examination

Bangladesh government has a separate constitutional body known as the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC). This commission is the inheritor of two institutions, the Bengal Public Service Commission (established in 1937) and the Pakistan Central Public Service Commission (1947).

One of the prime responsibilities of this commission is to conduct BCS examinations to nominate the qualified persons for different gazetted posts of the government. This commission is also responsible for formulating and advising the government about the procedure of selection for such posts. Articles 137-141

of the constitution states the structure and responsibilities of PSC. At present PSC has the provision for a post of Chairman and eleven members.

To assist the commission in administrative purpose, there is a secretariat termed as the Public Service Commission Secretariat with the designation of a ministry/department of the government.

It is alleged that the PSC, the responsible organ of the government for the selection and nomination of the qualified civil servants, is facing problems in fulfilling its responsibilities. Prof. Dr. M. Mohabbat Ali-Khan (Member, PSC) pointed that PSC does not have its own office building even after 22 years of its official existence. In 1988, the government approved the proposal to have a separate office for the commission. Eleven years have passed since then and still it is housed in a building which was once an airport building and is now shared with the Bangladesh Air Force. Commission has shortage of staffs and vehicles as well. One of the major problems that the commission faces in implementing its constitutional duties is with the designation of its Chairman and Members. Generally the appointed Chairman and the Members of PSC are retired or in-service professionals with the designation equivalent to a Secretary or an Additional Secretary. But after joining the PSC as a Member, his/her

designation comes down and is equivalent to that of a Joint Secretary. The Chairman's designation is equivalent to a Secretary, which is lower than that of the Cabinet Secretary. Due to these, there is the possibility that whenever PSC sends any recommendation or suggestion to different organs/ministries of the government, those proposals or recommendations may not receive proper attention from the concerned authorities.

Surely and certainly, these administrative shortcomings hamper the smooth functioning of the PSC. As a result, it has been observed that many recommendations/proposals concerning the improvisation of the BCS examination system remained in file, locked for a long period.

#### Quota system of government gazetted posts

According to the present government policy, 45% posts are to be selected on merit basis and the rest 55% are on district wise quota. Among these 55% district quota posts, 30% are reserved for the wardens of freedom fighters, 10% for women and 5% for tribal people. There is a strong public opinion that these quota systems are hampering the efficiency of the bureaucracy. During the pre-liberation period, when the West Pakistanis were deliberately depriving the then East Pakistanis, it was logical to demand a quota in the government service for the backward provinces or districts. But in independent Bangladesh, where all the districts/administrative units are getting similar treatment from the part of the government and where there is no existence of even allegations about such biased government policies, there seems little justification for maintaining such district quota provisions. It will encourage kinship in the government service. Besides, in the government cadres, where the number of vacant posts are very few each year, the introduction of district quota will deprive the less populated districts/divisions every year and the over populated divisions/districts will get the preference. But on the other hand the backward communities of our country, like women and tribal people, should be given the opportunity to increase their representation in the government service, so the quota for them ought to be maintained.

For some cadres in the government service, there is

no alternative but to give preference to the merit. Services in the foreign ministry or law ministry or the services of a doctor, an engineer or a teacher requires extremely meritorious and skillful personnel. Here any kind of quota system will definitely deprive the state from the services of the best-qualified ones.

Another implication of quota system is that this will give the opportunity to a less qualified person to attain something depriving a more qualified one. This naturally results in the decrease of efficiency of the government service. A developing country like Bangladesh, with a population much bigger than its resources, cannot afford to have a less efficient government service. The quota system needs to be reformulated immediately. Prof. Md. Mostafa Chowdhury (Chairman, PSC) while talking to this author, informed that PSC is aware of the problems of quota system and has sent its recommendations to the government but it is yet to take any decision.

**Excessive Number of candidates**  
Each year the number of candidates for government services is increasing. In fact it has increased to an unmanageable figure. The following data reveals the state of affairs.

Examination	Vacant Posts	Applicants	Ratio
1988 (9th BCS)	1,629	37,348	1:23
1989 (10th BCS)	1,247	28,419	1:23
1990 (11th BCS)	1,228	30,677	1:25
1991 (12th BCS)	1,021	37,539	1:37
1993 (15th BCS)	1,127	54,384	1:48
1995 (17th BCS)	2,026	65,502	1:32.3
1996 (18th BCS)	2,041	80,213	1:39
1998 (20th BCS)	1,322	83,277	1:63
*1999 (21st BCS)	934	85,000 (approx.)	1:91 (approx.)

Source: Annual Report 1998, Bangladesh Public Service Commission

\* As stated by Controller of Examinations, Bangladesh Public Service Commission

These figures clearly show that it has reached to an unimaginable ratio. As a result, the PSC is facing problem in running the exams smoothly and efficiently. Preliminary examination system has been introduced to bring the size of number of examinees to a figure somehow manageable. As for an example, out of 80,213 candidates 23,414 passed in the preliminary examination and qualified for the written examination. Still it is a large number for holding a thousand mark examinations at home and abroad with the provision of 64 optional subjects. This makes it time consuming also. It takes about two years to complete the whole process of a BCS examination. As for the 18th BCS examination, advertisement was given in November 1996 and the nominations of successful candidates were sent in August 1998.

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