

Anti quota demonstration turns violent after police action on the protesters. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

After the preliminary result of the 34th BCS, the students of all the public universities took to the streets to demand scrapping of the quota system. Ali, who is also an activist of this demonstration, says "Only 45 percent candidates are selected by their merit. The maximum 55 percent are from the quota of different categories. I have got 70 plus marks and didn't get selected but a candidate carrying only 50 plus marks is being selected thanks to the quota system. I feel completely hopeless. All my dreams have been destroyed by this preposterous system."

Joyonto Kumar Saha, a friend and a fellow activist also comments, "The government has published the new results selecting another 34,000 students but what about abolishing the quota? If this bizarre system is not removed, it will take its toll in the final selection. We will stick to our demand until the complete removal of this notorious system."

Quota Facts

Through the quota system some seats for any marginalised population of the country are reserved to increase their representation in business, education or in policy making process to avoid discrimination. Bangladesh first implemented the quota system in the very first civil service recruitment after the independence.

At that time to reconstruct the war affected society as well as the administration system 30 percent quota was preserved for the freedom fighters and 10 percent quota was preserved for the war affected women. This 40 percent quota was preserved to show gratitude to those valiant people who had freed the country from an oppressive regime. But no war affected woman came to avail the benefit of this 10 percent reservation probably for not having minimum requirement or because of the social stigma associated with her ordeal in '71.

A district quota of 40 percent was also ensured. At that time there were only19 districts in Bangladesh and this reservation was necessary to ensure the representation of under developed and far flung regions of devastated Bangladesh.

The first amendment to this quota system was made in 1976 where district quota was cut down to 20 percent and merit quota was increased to 40 percent. Others remained unchanged. In 1985 another amendment was introduced increasing the merit quota up to 45 percent and modification of the quota for war affected women to Women's Quota. In 1997 it was declared that if freedom fighters are not available, their wards can be taken under consideration. The BNP-Jamaat- led government of 2002 declared that if wards of freedom fighters do not fulfil the job requirements, the posts should be filled up from the merit quota.

As it was alleged at that time that the freedom fighters were being deprived by that process, the present Awami League government has declared that if the wards of freedom fighters are not available, the posts allocated by the quota should remain vacant. For this reason the Public Service Commission (PSC) has applied the quota provision in the 34th BCS Preliminary exam to avoid vacuum in the government service as applying quota in the viva exam left many posts unfilled due to the lack of able candidates.