

RESERVED SEATS

An impediment to empowerment?

NAZNEEN AHMED

WITH an aim to increase political participation of women, the system of reserved seats for women was first laid down in the 1972 Constitution. It provided for 15 indirectly reserved seats for women in the national parliament for ten years. In the local government, reserved seats for women was first introduced in 1997 thereby encouraging a large number of women to contest for these seats at all tiers of local government including the Union Parishad (UP).

The system of reservation has, to some extent, addressed the issue of women's under-representation in the political field and since the inception of this system, a large number of women have joined local government institutions too. However, the question still remains as to whether the system is leading women to a greater participation in politics and decision-making or limiting their participation to the reserved seats only.

Indeed, today the outcome of "reserved seats," is comparable to the public buses on the roads of Dhaka which have nine reserved seats for female passengers. This leads to the belief of both male and female passengers that women must sit only on those seats and they cannot occupy other seats because they already have nine "reserved" seats. Most of the time women passengers feel uncomfortable to sit elsewhere thinking that they are trespassing in male territory, something which they should not be doing. Likewise, reserved seats in the local government have created the impression among both women and men that other general seats cannot be contested by women. Therefore, arguably, although this system did increase women's presence in local politics, their presence does not translate into effective participation as women UP Members are not always aware of their functions. The system itself may be considered to be discriminatory because although the women UP Members from reserved seats represent larger constituencies, they do not have the same authority as Members belonging to general seats.

According to different studies, though initially reserved seats did prove to be successful in generating women's candidacy in local government elections, the number of women contestants has declined over time. For example, a study conducted by Democracy Watch, Steps Toward Development, Khan Foundation and PRIP Trust found that in the 2009 Upazila Elections, out of a total 2,900 female contestants, 481 women were elected to the reserved post of Upazila Vice Chairpersons in 480 Upazilas. By contrast, in the 2014 election, the number of female contestants dropped to 1507 in 458 Upazilas, thereby demonstrating a 48 percent decrease over five years.

So, why is it that women are not able to move out of the reserved seats? Why don't the political parties seem to want them to contest the general seats? This might come as a surprise given the scenario that our major political parties as well as the National Parliament are headed by women leaders and also given the fact that Bangladesh is a signatory to most of the international conventions, for instance, the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action

that seek to promote political empowerment of women. Women's active political participation and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making have been mandated in national law and policies such as the Representation of the People Order 1971 (amended in 2009), National Women's Policy 2011, the Sixth Five Year Plan to name but a few.

Looking at the declining figure of women's political candidacy, we might feel tempted to believe that the lack of family support, political grooming and patriarchal context could be discouraging factors inhibiting women's involvement in politics. However, in a 2013 study carried out by Dr. Pranab Kumar Pandey of Rajshahi University, 126 respondents (both male and female) from 21 Union Parishads were surveyed to identify the factors which they thought were constraints for women's political participation. While 62.5 percent and 50 percent of the UP Chairmen felt that physical mobility and family were barriers respectively, interestingly only 31.25

percent and 18.75 percent of the elected women members identified these as barriers. According to them, inconsistent legislation hindered their rights and responsibilities in public offices even more than the cultural or religious barriers.

Indeed there are interesting examples of local women who have been able to overcome cultural barriers and have evolved from being a homemaker to public representative. Development initiatives have been instrumental in mobilising and training local women in this regard. For example, Sharique, a local governance programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), reaches and identifies potential local women through voluntary citizen groups called "Ward Platforms" organised at the ward level. Such platforms serve as a bridge between UP representatives and the community and create a public space for local women to participate in decision-making in all areas of work, including planning and resource allocations. Sharique has helped around 10,000 women of these platforms in its intervention



experience earned her public trust to contest for one of the reserved seats of the UP. Today, as an elected Member, she represents Salukabad Union Parishad of Bishwamvarpur Upazila in Sunamganj district and says, "Strong willingness to engage in social services can lead toward women empowerment and the brightest example is our UP Chairman who is also a woman."

While these testimonies of women's emergence in local government are ones that Bangladesh will be proud to cite, if one is to look at the big picture beyond project interventions, then the entire system of reservation needs to be reassessed to determine how much voice it has lent to women in both national and local politics. Unless women on reserved seats feel motivated to contest for elections to general seats, the system of reservation will remain a limited measure that makes women's inclusion in the political system supplementary rather than mainstreamed.

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Who are our candidates?

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

THE elections of Dhaka-North, Dhaka-South and Chittagong City Corporations are only a few days away. Whether the quality of life of residents in these cities will improve will greatly depend on the quality of candidates contesting these elections. So who are our candidates?

By law, candidates of the City Corporation elections are required to file affidavits with their nomination, disclosing information about their education, profession, criminal records (if any), sources of income, assets and liabilities of themselves and their dependents - a requirement SHUJAN: Citizens for Good Governance was instrumental in making obligatory. Candidates are also required to file their tax returns.

On the March 25 deadline of filing nomination papers, Dhaka-North had a total of 650 candidates; however, after the withdrawal deadline, only 382 contestants remained - 16 for mayors, 277 from general seats and 89 from reserve seats.

Similarly, on March 25, Dhaka-South had a total of 811 candidates, however, after the withdrawal deadline, 502 contestants remained - 20 for mayors, 387 from general seats and 95 from reserve seats.

For Chittagong, on March 25, a total of 372 candidates filed nominations, however, after the withdrawal deadline, 288 candidates remained - 12 for mayors, 214 from general seats and 62 from reserve seats.

According to the Election Commission website on April 13, the number of final candidates in these elections was 1,172, although the number subsequently increased to 1,190. We have analysed the affidavits and tax returns of these 1,172 candidates and present below our findings.

South are contractors. Of these, at least 13 are contractors of the two city corporations (Samakal, April 3, 2015). By law, contractors of city corporations are ineligible to contest in elections of those corporations. These contractor-candidates transferred their contractors' license in the name of other persons and took a certificate from the respective corporation to contest the election. Getting these contractors elected would amount to making jackals guard the hen-house.

It may be noted that out of 860 contestants from general seats of two city corporations of Dhaka, 155 or 18 percent currently have cases against them. By contrast, 54 of the 93 or 58 percent of the BNP-supported candidates currently have cases against them. Out of these, 17 have murder and 22 have attempted murder cases against them. Candidates claim that such cases have been filed by the Awami League government and are intended to harass them (Prothom Alo, April 13, 2015). Incidentally, according to the information received from the affidavits, the BNP-supported mayoral candidate Mirza Abbas from Dhaka-South had/have the highest number of cases against him - previously he had 23 cases and currently he has 37 cases against him.

The wealth statements of many of the candidates show that the candidates are not overly affluent. Of the 48 mayoral candidates, only six, and only eight contestants from general seats have annual incomes of over Tk 1 crore, which is quite hard to believe. None of the candidates from reserved seats have an annual income of Tk 1 crore. The mayoral candidates with yearly income of Tk 1 crore or more are: Anisul Haque and Tabitha Awal of Dhaka-North, Mirza Abbas and Mowalid Saifuddin of Dhaka-South, and AJM Nasiruddin and Monjur Alam of Chittagong.

*The concealment of information about income and wealth is widespread. By law, candidates concealing information or giving wrong information in their affidavits are ineligible to contest and even hold office, if elected.*

One of the most attractive aspects of these elections is that most of the mayoral candidates are young. Unfortunately out of the 48 mayoral candidates, none are women. Moreover, only 17 women are contesting from general seats (for councillors).

In terms of educational background, 88 percent of Dhaka-North mayoral candidates have a Bachelor's or higher degrees. In Dhaka-North, 45 percent of mayoral candidates possess similar educational qualifications. By contrast, only 25 percent of Chittagong mayoral candidates have such degrees. With regard to councillor candidates, 48 percent have education levels less than SSC. Although low academic qualification does not constitute disqualification, academic qualifications definitely offer some advantages to elected officials.

Regarding their profession, 69 percent of mayoral candidates of three cities are businessmen. Similarly, 79 percent of contestants from general seats are businessmen. On the other hand, 32 percent of contestants from reserved seats are engaged in business while 38 percent are housewives. It is certain that businessmen will be elected mayors from all three cities and 80-90 percent of elected councillors from general seats will be from the same profession. Thus, it appears that the city corporations will be dominated by businessmen just like our parliament.

A significant number of candidates are building contractors. According to Prothom Alo (April 18, 2015), 90 candidates contesting for general seats of Dhaka-North and Dhaka-

Thirteen of the mayoral candidates and their dependents have assets of over Tk 1 crore. Only 51 contestants from regular seats have assets of Tk 1 crore or more. Nine of the mayoral candidates have liabilities of Tk 1 crore or more, and two of them have substantially more liabilities than assets. It should be noted that assets are reported in acquired values, not market values.

Five of the mayoral candidates do not pay income taxes. Of the rest, 14 pay taxes of more than Tk 1 lakh and two pay taxes of more than Tk 1 crore. Many wealthy candidates do not pay significant amount of taxes.

All of the above information came from the candidates' affidavits and tax returns, although their veracity is highly questionable. We suspect that the concealment of information about income and wealth is widespread. By law, candidates concealing information or giving wrong information in their affidavits are ineligible to contest and even hold office, if elected. In addition, swearing wrong affidavits is a criminal offense. Thus, if the Election Commission would closely scrutinise the affidavits, many undesirable persons could be kept out of our electoral arena. The provision of 'counter-affidavits' could also play a significant role in this regard.

The writer is Secretary of SHUJAN.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Comic's forte
- 6 Convoy trucks
- 11 Really impressed
- 12- Garde
- 13 "Bye Bye Bye" band
- 14 "Hondo" star
- 15 Soaking spot
- 16 Deep groove
- 18 Pollen collector
- 19 Before, to Byron
- 20 One, for Juan
- 21 Sushi choice
- 22 Fine point
- 24 Neat
- 25 Best
- 27 Stadium event
- 29 1998 Winter Olympics site

DOWN

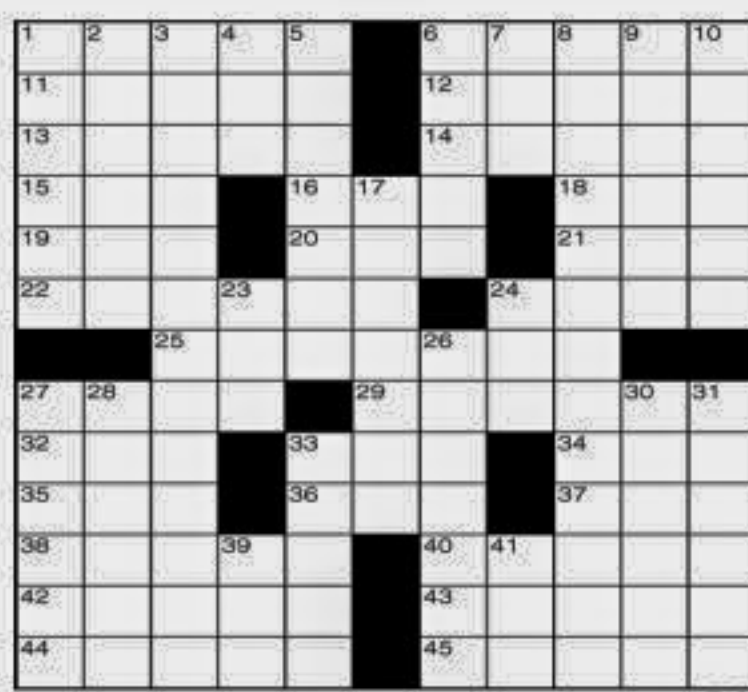
- 1 Gave clues
- 2 Hesitant
- 3 Jackson 5 song
- 4 Hold
- 5 New enlistee

ACROSS

- 32 Old roadster
- 33 Singer Tormé
- 34 Janitor's stool
- 35 Bruins legend
- 36 Lupino of film
- 37 Hail, to Caesar
- 38 The fifth element
- 40 Barber's stool
- 42 Dwelling
- 43 "...-man who wasn't there"
- 44 More original
- 45 Staffers

DOWN

- 6 Handled
- 7 Juan Peron's wife
- 8 Paul McCartney song
- 9 Poor
- 10 Unwavering
- 17 Like blank paper
- 23 Galoot
- 24 Gentle Pull
- 26 Quinine's target
- 27 Singer Josh
- 28 Oxygen-thriving organism
- 30 Thumbs down
- 31 Verdi works
- 33 Pit worker
- 39 Shelley work
- 41 Paris pal



Yesterday's answer

B A B A S I M P E L  
A G A V E N A I V E  
R E C O N D R E A D  
K N A V E S  
S E W T A X F A T  
A R A G O N L I S A  
W A T E R S P O R T S  
U S E R A L B E R T  
P E R O N E W O E  
O T T A W A  
C H A N T S A T O N  
O U N C E E L E N A  
P E T E R S T R A P

**QUOTABLE Quote**

Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive.

Elbert Hubbard

**বাংলাদেশ চিনি ও খাদ্য শিল্প করপোরেশন**

চিনি শিল্প ভবন, ৩, দিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০  
Bangladesh Sugar & Food Industries Corporation  
Chinshilpa Bhaban, 3, Dilkusha Commercial Area, Dhaka-1000  
Fax: 88-2-9555780, 9550481, Phone: 9565890, E-mail: chinikal@yahoo.com  
সূত্র নংঃ সিএসবি/চিনিশিল্প ভবন ভাড়া/০১/২০১৫/১৯১ তারিখঃ ২৩/০৪/২০১৫খ্রিঃ

**অফিস স্পেস ভাড়া দেওয়ার দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

সচিব, বিএসএফআইসি কর্তৃক ৩নং দিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০ এ অবস্থিত চিনিশিল্প ভবনের ৪র্থ ও ৯ম তলায় যথাক্রমে ৬,১৭৪ বর্গফুট ও ৬,১৭৪ বর্গফুট সহ মোট ১২,৩৪৮ বর্গফুট ফ্লোর স্পেস অফিস হিসেবে এবং ২য় বেজমেন্টে ৮ (আট) গািড়ি পার্কিং স্পেসসহ ব্যবহারে অগ্রহী প্রতিষ্ঠিত ব্যাংক/বীমা/আর্থিক ও ব্যবসায়িক প্রতিষ্ঠানের সাথে ৫ (পাঁচ) বৎসর মেয়াদে চুক্তি সম্পাদনের লক্ষ্যে ভাড়া দেওয়ার জন্য দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্রের সাথে ৪র্থ ও ৯ম তলা অর্থাৎ প্রতি তলার জন্য পৃথকভাবে জামানত হিসেবে ডিডি/পে-অর্ডার এর মাধ্যমে ১,৫০,০০০/- (এক লক্ষ পঞ্চাশ হাজার) টাকা (ফেরতযোগ্য) যে কোন সিডিউল ব্যাংকে হতে "বাংলাদেশ চিনি ও খাদ্য শিল্প করপোরেশন" এর অনুকূলে জমা দিতে হবে। জামানতের অর্থ ব্যতীত দাখিলকৃত দরপত্র সরাসরি বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে। দরপত্রের সকল প্রকার শর্তাবলী সম্বলিত প্রতি সেট সিডিউল ১,০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) মূল্যের বিনিময়ে হিসাব বিভাগ, চিনিশিল্প ভবন (৮ম তলা), ৩নং দিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০ হতে আগামী ১২/০৫/২০১৫ইং তারিখ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে ক্রয় করা যাবে। দরপত্র নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর অফিসের সম্মুখে (চিনিশিল্প ভবনের ৬ষ্ঠ তলা) রক্ষিত টেভার বাক্সে আগামী ১৩/০৫/২০১৫ইং তারিখ দুপুর ১২:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত গৃহীত হলে এবং ঐ দিনই দুপুর ১২:৩০ ঘটিকায় দরদাতাদের উপস্থিতিতে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) খোলা হবে। কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করেন।

এ এস এম আবদার হোসেন  
সচিব  
ফোন-৯৫৬৫৮৬৮

এসএফ-২৮৪  
জিডি-১৫০০

**ভাস্কর্য/মনুমেন্ট এর নকশা প্রণয়নের উন্মুক্ত প্রতিযোগিতা**

জাপান ও বাংলাদেশ এর মধ্যকার সমঝোতা অনুযায়ী দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ চলাকালে জাপানে আনবিক বোমায় নিহত ও আহতদের স্মরণে "নাগাসাকি পিস পার্ক" এ বাংলাদেশ থেকে একটি শান্তির ভাস্কর্য/মনুমেন্ট স্থাপনের সিদ্ধান্ত গৃহীত হয়।

উন্মুক্ত প্রতিযোগিতার মাধ্যমে স্থপতি ও শিল্পীদের দাখিলকৃত নকশা থেকে এ ভাস্কর্য/মনুমেন্ট এর নকশা বিচারকমন্ডলী কর্তৃক নির্বাচন করা হবে। বিচারকমন্ডলী কর্তৃক নির্বাচিত প্রথম, দ্বিতীয় ও তৃতীয় স্থান অধিকারীর জন্য যথাক্রমে পাঁচ লক্ষ, তিন লক্ষ ও দুই লক্ষ টাকা পুরস্কার প্রদান করা হবে। প্রথম, দ্বিতীয় ও তৃতীয় স্থান অধিকারী ছাড়াও আরও ৭ (সাত) টি নির্বাচিত নকশার জন্য প্রত্যেককে পঞ্চাশ হাজার টাকা পুরস্কার প্রদান করা হবে।

প্রথম স্থান অধিকারী স্থপতি/শিল্পী পররাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রণালয়ের সাথে সম্পাদিত চুক্তি অনুযায়ী পরবর্তী কার্যক্রম গ্রহণ করবেন। এ প্রকল্প সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত তথ্যসম্বলিত তথ্যাদি নগদ একশত টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) প্রদানের মাধ্যমে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর অফিস থেকে নির্ধারিত তারিখ ও সময় পর্যন্ত সংগ্রহ করা যাবে। ভাস্কর্য/মনুমেন্ট এর নকশা ও মডেল আগামী ৭ জুন ২০১৫ দুপুর ১২টা থেকে বিকাল ৩টা পর্যন্ত স্থাপত্য অধিদপ্তরের নীচ তলার সম্মেলন কক্ষে জমা নেয়া হবে।

প্রকল্প সম্পর্কে তথ্যাদি সংগ্রহ: আ.স.ম. আমিনুর রহমান  
৪, ৫ ও ৬ মে ২০১৫ উপ-প্রধান স্থপতি, সার্কেল-১  
(সকাল ১০:০০ টা থেকে ৪:০০টা) স্থাপত্য অধিদপ্তর  
প্রকল্প সম্পর্কে ধারণা প্রদান: স্থাপত্য ভবন  
৬ মে ২০১৫ বিকাল ৫:০০টা সেগুনবাগিচা, ঢাকা  
(স্থাপত্য অধিদপ্তরের সম্মেলন কক্ষ) ফোনঃ ৯৫৫৫০৮১১

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