

# A Dream Job



**W**HEN it comes to getting a job, academic credentials barely cut it these days; employers want the sun, the moon and the stars: skills in interpersonal

communication, problem-solving, writing, and experience - the labyrinth no one knows a way out of. Can't get a job without it and can't get it without a job.

Employers go through quite a bit of due diligence before they finally make you an offer. Background checks are a must. Former employers are contacted to verify last designation, salary, dates of employment, job performance - anything you put on the application form. References are consulted to understand more about you.

After you have cleared all these hurdles and are made an offer, then very often they will give you a test run, formally known as probationary period, during which the employer will observe and evaluate your performance and terminate the employment if you do not meet the standards.

All this applies to us ordinary folks...but what about ministers, holders of the most coveted jobs of all in most countries of the world? What are the qualifications required for being a minister? A true story from India may be relevant here. A man goes to a Ministry to see the minister. His son needs a job. He has high expectations from the minister who is a childhood friend and hails from the same village. The minister requests the secretary of the ministry, a brilliant IAS officer, to do something. A couple of weeks go by. Nothing happens. So the minister asks the secretary if he has had a chance to



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look into the matter. The secretary tells him that the young man has studied only up to class three and, therefore, does not qualify for any government job. A little agitated, the minister says, "Are you telling me that there is no government job that he qualifies for?"

"The only job he can have is yours," the secretary says calmly.

The message here is clear enough. To be eligible, ministers do not require any academic qualifications or experience. That's true in most countries including ours. But that's not to say that one has to hold a PhD or a Masters to be a great leader. There are plenty of examples in this country and elsewhere in the world of great men and women who have led their nations to achieve great things - leaders who may not have been to top

universities or colleges of the world, or even had very little formal education, but have proven their worth by changing people's lives for the better. They are known for their wisdom, vision and humility. They are humble about their revolutionary success.

But the recent unruly behaviour of a few cabinet members in this country raises questions about the kind of vetting process they were subject to. How many times are they allowed to breach the confidence of the public before they are called on the carpet?

For instance, a deputy minister allegedly beat up a sub-inspector of Police earlier this month when the latter offered the minister security following an accident in Savar involving the minister's car. "Are you fit to give

me security? Do you want to see how many shots I can fire and how many you can?" he jeered. When the inspector said he was just doing his job, the deputy minister got angry and threatened to dismiss him. Why on earth would a sitting minister want to enter a shooting competition with a policeman?

Just five months ago, the same deputy minister vandalised the room of a joint secretary of the ministry simply because his name did not appear in a banner put up at a National Youth Day programme. So he went to the joint secretary's room, broke the computer, threw down documents, and kicked the table. The then-secretary of the ministry, a former IGP of Police, reportedly said, "A thing like this had not ever happened in the Secretariat."

In 2014, in Kalihati of Tangail, a cabinet minister who was later fired and ended up in jail for making derogatory remarks about religion, hit a PDB engineer with a stick to the point where his head started bleeding.

What kind of examples are these men, tasked with the responsibility of making policy decisions, setting for us? Are they not causing damage to the reputation of other members of the cabinet who are well known for their humility? If ministers start beating up public officials because they have more power than the latter, what will stop public officials from battering the common man? And what will prevent the stronger common man from pounding the lesser common man? What checks the chain reaction?

"There should be an attempt to bring about civility in public life including public officials both elected and selected," Dr Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, retired professor of Public Administration at Dhaka University, former member of the PSC and UGC, says. "There should be some

form of training for political persons on civility, morality and ethics. Citizens should also be more selective in choosing candidates. The onus of the burden is also on the citizens to whom politicians are accountable."

There is a code of conduct that public officials have to abide by. Is there any for ministers? "There is no code of conduct for ministers as such. When someone takes the oath as a minister he or she agrees to uphold certain values," says Dr Khan.

Hot temper in ministers and other elected officials is not uncommon. In 2014, India's Parliament erupted in chaos over a bill to create a new state called Telangana, with angry MPs coming to blows, pulling out a microphone and pepper-spraying the chamber. In 2009, US Congressman Joe Wilson interrupted a speech by US President Barack Obama to the joint session of Congress by shouting, "You lie!" Jim Callaghan, the British Prime Minister, was often called a "thug" and "bully", but later mellowed into amiable "Sunny Jim". Winston Churchill - an exception to the manners of aristocratic men who dominated British politics well into the 20th century - was labelled 'rough, sarcastic and overbearing' by none other than his wife Clementine whose advice to him still holds for VIPs in all countries: "urbanity, kindness and if possible - Olympian calm" works better than "irascibility and rudeness [which] will breed either dislike or a slave mentality".

The point of this article is not to throw mud at ministers, most of whom do their best to serve the public. Why should a few be allowed to give a bad name to politicians in general and set a bad example for the citizens? How can our children learn civility without seeing much in some policymakers?

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

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# The system works

ZARINA NAHAR KABIR

**I** am getting off a jet plane, coming home. Soon I will be collecting my bags. If I am lucky, "soon" will be a matter of 15-20 minutes, otherwise two and a half hours to three is not an unexpected wait. The latter was my experience a couple of months ago. The time between getting off the jet plane and picking up the bags is spent at the immigration line. Yes, this is at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Most people these days have machine-readable passports - Bangladeshi or foreign - and it is merely a question of scanning the passports to digitally record the data of the person entering the country. What can possibly take so long to scan a passport? While waiting in line, it is almost customary for the passengers, otherwise unknown to each another, to start up friendly, but somewhat edgy conversations, on the real life drama being enacted in which they are unwilling actors. Dialogues centre on how some people don't realise that they are waiting in the wrong queue. When they do realise it, they think it's fine to jump to the front of the actual line. Newsflash! No, it is not 'alright' for another person pay for your mistakes by letting you to push yourself to the prow. The supervisory officers do nothing to correct such behaviour, until screaming and fighting reaches its peak.

At times, the officer at the immigration counter discovers that the passenger has not filled up the immigration card and allows the person to stand at the counter to do so, rather than taking on the next person while



the said person fills up the required information. Isn't this simple logic?

There are times when frequent power failure result in shutdowns of the computers used by the officials, which take way too long to reboot as the generators come to life. At times, the system cannot handle it when too many flights land simultaneously, bringing in thousands to get their immigration clearance. By now, the sense of excitement of coming home is in shreds, and the tiredness of many hours of travel, coupled with the tension of how much longer one has to hold it in

till the use of a decent toilet, starts to set in. One just wants to get out of there. Most of the problems faced by passengers at the immigration counter at the airport are due to lack of discipline at individual and systemic level. If systemic discipline can be introduced, individuals will have no other option but to follow the rules, just as we do the moment we step out of Bangladesh and into countries that is governed by actual rules.

The objective of my latest trip to Dhaka was to collect articles written by my deceased father, which he published

in various newspapers over a span of 15 years. I was already feeling overwhelmed about the magnitude of the task. I would have to go to different newspaper offices and government libraries to achieve my aim of collecting around a thousand articles. I was advised to find contacts who could request the head of the government institutions to extend me help. The suggested contacts were ministers and government secretaries. Apparently, nothing else would work in getting me access to documents which are supposed to be public. As if I were a foreigner in my own country, I was told

that this was how things worked in Bangladesh. I am a strong believer of citizens making their demands in a systematic way, so that the other end is given an opportunity to respond. The demand side of a system has its social responsibility in making the demand, just as the supply side does in responding to it.

I decided to approach the government institutions with a standard written request which outlined the purpose of my work. That was all that was necessary to get permission from the Public Library, Central Library, Press Institute, and National Archives. Some places required a fee that would enable me access to the archives over a period of time. Others had the requisite of a nominal membership fee. I was more than happy to pay for the invaluable services I got to avail. I was impressed by the systematic way the newspapers were archived, bound and categorised. This made my task of thumbing through almost 15,000 newspapers smooth and efficient so say the least. Every single individual at these government institutions provided genuine assistance in helping me to get access to the material I needed. They even suggested places I could check out, if I could not get everything that I required from their respective organisations.

The system worked for me. I needed to believe that the system would provide me my rightful access to the services without having to pull any strings. It is up to us to take the straight path of using the system and not abuse it.

The writer is Associate Professor of Public Health, Karolinska Institutet, Sweden.

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**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

ACROSS

- Mama's mate
- Guiding maxims
- Skewed
- Rub the wrong way
- Thug
- Dinner wine
- North Pole worker
- Mall unit
- Labor group
- Hailed vehicle
- Studied for a heist
- Geography class aid
- Symmetry line
- Burden
- Casino machines
- Big apartments

DOWN

- Book unit
- MP's quarry
- Abundance
- Writer Rand
- Swaggering
- Stretched square
- Sting operation
- Blackgoo

31 Brood watcher

32 17-syllable poem

34 Utah team

35 Bodily pouch

38 Familiar feeling

41 Knoll

42 Laundry worker

43 Tiny amount

44 "Bonanza" star worker

45 Winter blanket

9 Keats creation

10 Determined

16 "Ice Age" sloth

18 Comfy spot

19 Mix-up

20 Touch on

21 Porgy's love

22 Moolah

23 Wheel bar

25 "Behold!"

29 Free of stubble

30 Columnist Smith

33 Sky color

34 Tarzan's love

36 Choir voice

37 Hammer part

38 Use a spade

39 Bungle

40 Coffee, in slang

41 Towel word

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

WEFT TALON  
AMOUR ADORE  
FINGER FOODS  
END VET MET  
RELIED REAL  
MYBAD IDLE  
SLEDS  
GAME VEERS  
IRAN ITSELF  
OCTALE COO  
THUMBSCREWS  
TERRE TIDES  
ODETS MERE

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