

# A fair recruitment policy for a stronger government

## Rapist on the loose

Don't let him get away

UP chairman in Noakhali, accused of beating and raping a woman, is roaming around freely. With rape on the rise across the country, it is not clear why police had initially refused to register the case and needed persuasion from locals to do so eventually. It is even more disturbing that the police, reportedly, is now making no real effort to catch the perpetrator.

The case is a stark reminder of the reality that regardless of the rise across the country, it is not clear as to why police had initially refused to register the case and needed persuasion from locals to do so eventually. It is even more disturbing that the police, reportedly, is now making no real effort to catch the perpetrator.

The case is a stark reminder of the reality that regardless of the rise across the country, it is not clear as to why police had initially refused to register the case and needed persuasion from locals to do so eventually. It is even more disturbing that the police, reportedly, is now making no real effort to catch the perpetrator.

The case is a stark reminder of the reality that regardless of the rise across the country, it is not clear as to why police had initially refused to register the case and needed persuasion from locals to do so eventually. It is even more disturbing that the police, reportedly, is now making no real effort to catch the perpetrator.

## Severe noise pollution in Dhaka!

Implement pollution rules immediately

THE Department of Environment (DoE) has conducted a study on sound pollution at 70 points in Dhaka city. The results are alarming. The sound level in many places is as high as 120-130 decibels (dB) which is almost double the permissible limit. The World Health Organisation states that 60dB sound can make a person deaf temporarily and 100 dB can cause complete deafness.

The study tells us that a tenth of city dwellers suffer from hearing impairment and 35 percent are suffering various degrees of hearing problems. We are talking about millions of people with permanent or partial damage to hearing. The Noise Pollution (Control) Rules 2006, had they ever been implemented, would disallow brick crushers within a 500-metre radius of a residential area. It would make it mandatory for people or organisations to take prior permission before using loudspeakers and offenders could potentially face a month of jail time or Tk 5,000 or both.

The sad reality here is that when it comes to protecting public health, successive governments have shown greater preference in formulating laws rather than implementing them. Now that we know the results of such law implementation rules, precisely what do authorities intend to do about the situation? Because we are not talking only about impaired hearing since sound pollution also causes various mental illnesses and is known to cause high blood pressure and increased chances of cardiac arrest amongst other things.

There is a cost involved with each of these conditions that ultimately come back full circle to put pressure on public health expenditure. It is high time awareness campaigns were launched accompanied by the long-delayed implementation of the 2006 rules because otherwise, the pollution will keep growing, making millions more sick in Dhaka city.



BIRU PAKSHIA PAUL

**OPEN SKY**  
AMERICA took capitalism and the US economy as the basis for its economic model from the first day of independence in the late 18th century. In the subsequent centuries, the US continued its progress as the market economy fosters the culture of competition and empowers the customers to choose the best out of many alternatives.

Development continued until the early 20th century when the economy faced the Great Depression and the system came under strong criticism. Economist John Maynard Keynes argued that a strong government is always needed no matter what type of economic system you dwell in. However, as economist Paul Krugman points out, Keynes' objective was to fix capitalism, not replace it. And that fixing is possible in the presence of a robust government whose strength hinges on its fair and truly competitive recruitment policy.

In Bangladesh, quotas and viva voce are the two main barriers to fair recruitment in the public services. The number of vacant positions is already severely disproportionate to the size of the population and, more specifically, the annual number of new entrants to the workforce, which is more than two million. The system of quotas, which occupies more than 50 percent of the public-sector jobs, is ruining the spirit of competitive hiring under Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC). It won't be an overstatement to say that this system, which has been in practice since Liberation, has become a major institutional discrimination frustrating the general graduates. I think the percentage of job quotas should be reduced to, say, 10 percent for the sake of competitive recruitment. According to the Constitution, all citizens of the country should get equal treatment in all

areas of public services.

From a theoretical perspective, quota-based recruitment is not conducive to labour productivity. The production function in economic theory is composed of three major things: labour, capital, and technology. Labour with medium quality cannot help develop high-quality capital and fails to invent or adopt the best technology for stimulating growth. A poorly-trained doctor cannot perform surgery efficiently. A half-educated dentist is likely to extract the wrong tooth. We see these symptoms of inefficiency when government administrators, once selected

indigenous colleagues who entered the workforce through special consideration. Keeping some quotas for the candidates from the original or indigenous communities is a universal practice. We should also honour that practice. Additionally, keeping a reasonable number of quotas for women is also imperative to ensure greater participation of women in the labour force and thus to foster women's empowerment. All other quotas, frankly speaking, are unnecessary and quite unjustified. An outright elimination of all quotas may not be a practical decision, hence the need for

manufacture the freedom fighter identity, which is disturbing, to say the least. The relevant ministries must job now seems to be focused on stretching out the list of freedom fighters. And we won't be surprised if the list one day engulfs the entire population. The freedom fighters of Bangladesh were born in 1971 without any expectation of having quota advantages after independence. They did so because they loved their motherland. We owe a great debt of gratitude to them, but a bundle of salaried jobs cannot pay back that debt.

Secondly, the provision of giving too much importance to viva voce breeds nepotism, favoritism, and bribery, and ultimately fuels corruption to take a permanent seat in the public recruitment system. Viva voce may have a small allocation of marks, say, 10 percent, but passing the viva separately shouldn't be made mandatory for the job seekers. The meritorious candidates from poor backgrounds or from disadvantaged groups don't have their 'tandies' to make fortune-changing phone calls to the members of the viva boards. There is no one to stand beside those 'unlucky' jobseekers. Let us change these traditional systems that breed corruption and inefficiency in the public-sector recruitment process. We cannot expect a strong public administration until we go for a selection model almost entirely based on merit.

In an economy where the number of unemployed people is over 70 lakh, the public sector has to play a pioneering role in ensuring a fair and scientific recruitment system and set an example for all others—banks, corporations, private enterprises—to follow. This reform will make the young generation less frustrated, and motivate them to strive for the best by dint of merit and hard work, not by the unfair game of quotas or 'uncle-influenced' interviews.



through quotas, cannot exercise a project skillfully and in a timely fashion. Our economy cannot afford this type of system loss in the name of favouring multiple segments under the quota system in an otherwise homogeneous society. It is simply unfair, and let us get rid of it gradually to ensure a purely talented administration.

gradual elimination. Some quotas will also have proved unnecessary over time. Women, for example, will occupy better positions in the future as their academic results in recent years signal so.

Of course, the system cannot be eliminated entirely. When I worked for the Australian government, I had

After independence, the quota for freedom fighters in government jobs was justified, but its wholesale extension to their next generations has done more harm than good. There have been a number of reported incidents in which job applicants resorted to dishonesty to



SELINA MOHSIN

**DISCRIMINATION** is often the transferee of moral degradation to others. The Maldives presents many examples of it in its treatment of migrant workers. Take Malé's old Sanan Park, now upgraded and renamed Rastani Bageecha. Its large, open space and fine old trees provide a rare haven of peace in the otherwise congested capital. On Fridays, Bangladeshi and other migrant workers used to go there to relax. Now they have to pay USD 75 as entry fee, which hardly any of them can afford. Those unaware of this recent discriminatory imposition are summarily thrown out by the police.

Maldives, once a very poor country, acquired wealth in recent decades through international tourism and tuna fish exports. As wealth grew, more and more Maldivians stopped working and imported labourers from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Discrimination, even hatred, of foreign labour became widespread.

Unskilled Bangladeshi job-seekers pay USD 2,500-3,000 to the brokers who paint a promising picture of employment in the Maldives. Bangladeshi brokers collude with Maldivian agents to facilitate fraudulent recruitment and forced labour. The workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. On arrival their passports and documents are often seized by the agents and they are forced to work in arduous conditions. Expatriate labourers, mostly Bangladeshis, constitute a significant part of the population. They are mostly unskilled and forced to work over 14 hours a day in the construction industry and the service sector. They get the lowest wage of USD 100-150 per month, which is usually not paid regularly.

Construction of high-rise buildings in Malé and of luxurious overwater bungalows and pavilions in the island resorts ignore safety precautions and is extremely hazardous. Workers' deaths are commonplace. Maldivians have moved from other inhabited islands to settle in Malé, only two kilometres away, making it the most congested capital in the world. The cost of living is sky-high, employment opportunities are limited and education is of dubious quality. The numerous youth of the tiny capital are largely unorganised. With inadequate opportunities for fruitful jobs, many form unregulated gangs of brown-sugar addicts. Riding their motor bikes precariously through narrow roads and armed with

knives they often target migrant workers to extract money for ransoms.

In 2008, the US Department of State placed Maldives on its Tier 2 Watch List for human trafficking. In 2010, with the help of former president Mohamed Nasheed, I, then serving as Bangladesh High Commissioner, was able to legalise over 17,000 migrant workers unjustly fired or whose promised jobs had never materialised. I also managed to stop a moratorium against Bangladeshi recruitment.

Later, in 2013, Maldives narrowly escaped relegation to Tier 3 Watch List and international sanctions by US Department of State by quickly enacting Anti-Human Trafficking Act regarding transparent recruitment procedure; unjust dismissal; unpaid wages; breach of contract and violation of employment rights.

But the government failed to

death. Two days later, another Bangladeshi was found dead in Thoddo island and two more were stabbed in the capital.

These murders and stabbings sent panic among the Bangladeshis. Some doing sub-human, manual labour in the high-end resorts decided to protest against their deplorable treatment. The government banned the protest, threatening deportation without salary. Also in 2015, a Bangladeshi by the name of Basso died in a horrifying way. His face was smashed and his body mutilated. No one was arrested despite evidence implicating a Maldivian.

Subsequently, two workers were kidnapped, robbed and brutally beaten in an employment agency. It is surprising that the workers are terrified of their employers'.

numerous such painful incidents. The situation is still deteriorating. In 2016, the Maldivian Parliament passed a law imposing three percent tax on all migrant workers' wages. This draconian law seems aimed at breaking the morale of the workers whose wages are already often not given to them for months.

A Maldivian human rights activist, Tholal, cited that "it is not in the spirit of international law and the constitution that a tax is imposed on the personal income of foreign workers, the most marginalised group in society, when Maldivians do not even pay any income tax."

Despite suffering such harassment, many workers cannot leave to return home due to outstanding debts to their brokers and fears of reprisal. A Maldivian government official has even cited the migrant workers as 'threats to

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Drive against stockists needed

Last month we saw a laudable initiative taken by the police in Dhaka. Although it was a small-scale drive, it revealed some culpable practices of the high-ups in society. Secretaries, MPs, army personnel, journalists, and even police officers' vehicles driving on the wrong side of the road were caught red-handed by the police. This drive proves that no one is above the law.

If similar drives are conducted against the network involved in hiking the price of rice and other essential commodities, people can breathe a sigh of relief. It is my humble request to the incumbent government to take necessary steps against those responsible for creating an artificial shortage of grocery items resulting in price hike.

Ashok Tanvir Anik, Rajshahi

### Make kidney dialysis affordable

Very often patients with kidney diseases need dialysis. Kidney Foundation and a few other public hospitals have dialysis equipment. They are providing the service at a nominal cost, but the number of seats is very limited in these hospitals. So, most patients have to depend on private clinics for dialysis where the charge is very high, meaning that it becomes impossible for many patients to bear the cost. In my opinion, government hospitals, private clinics and NGOs should be encouraged and give proper attention to this humanitarian issue so that more kidney patients can get dialysis at an affordable cost.

Abul Khaer, Tangail

### A Bangladeshi worker in Malé, Maldives.

implement the enacted laws and the situation has not improved. The workers remain the most vulnerable section of the society and are virtually "owned" by their employers.

In 2015, a group of youths entered a cafe and demanded free coffee from Shaheen Mia, a Bangladeshi worker. As he was not the owner, he explained that he had no permission to serve free coffee. Thereupon the gang damaged the cafe and threatened him. He apprised the police of the incident but no action was taken, and the next day his body was found; he had been brutally stabbed to

over the world for their exotic overwater bungalows, hide tragic stories. They are built by the blood, sweat, tears and even lives of Bangladeshis workers.

Construction over the Indian Ocean lagoons is extremely hazardous. Once two Bangladeshis were installing a long wooden pole in the water when the pole fell on their heads, their deaths were instantaneous. I sent a strong letter to the foreign tourist company for compensation for the families of the deceased. I was informed that the workers were sub-contracted from a Maldivian company which had no provision for compensations. There are

national security."

It is easy to blame the disenfranchised. It is easy to dehumanise the makers living on the edge of society. This is the sad truth about the tourist paradise Maldives. Corruption is the life. The judiciary compromised and the constitution ignored. Violence is common and fighting among political parties rampant as Maldives increasingly veers towards a failed state. It is high time that the international community and the Bangladesh government took serious steps to help the distressed workers.

Source: Madullu.org. Former ambassador of the Bangladesh government.



SOURCE: MADULLU.ORG