

It's 11 am. Mosammat Ayesha rushes to the classroom of grade four to take attendance. After the roll call, she asks the students to open their English grammar book and go through a grammar lesson. While the students fumble through their books, Ayesha quickly moves to the classroom of grade five. There, she again takes the attendance and asks the students to open their mathematics books. Instructing them to solve some arithmetic problems, she returns to the classroom of grade four to help students with grammar lessons.

Every day, Ayesha must juggle two classes at a

has disappointed the ministry and the candidates as well. BPSC has managed to fill only 303 out of 4320 vacant posts of primary school headmasters. The rest of the posts remain vacant although the ministry has recommended that all of these posts be filled by the 36th BCS qualifiers.

Md Jahirul Islam is one of the candidates not recommended by the BPSC although he was fully eligible for the post of primary school headmaster. He says, "BPSC promised us that all the vacant non-cadre posts would be filled by the qualifiers of 36th BCS exam. For many of us, this is the last BCS exam as we have reached the maximum age

government jobs for all job seekers; there are other issues to be taken into consideration. Aktari Momtaz, Secretary, BPSC, explains, "For recruitment in the non-cadre posts, we have to consider educational qualification of the candidates and educational qualification required for the vacant post. If the qualifications do not match, we cannot recruit them. Again, there is an issue of quota. A good number of posts have to be reserved for the candidates who are eligible for quotas. This is why we cannot fill up all the non-cadre posts even if there are qualified candidates." Nonetheless, Dr Kadir argues that educational

is a complicated and time-consuming process. At first, we request ministries to send job requisition letters mentioning vacant Class 1 and Class 2 posts which could be filled by the BCS qualifiers. Then, we ask the candidates whether they want to be recruited as non-cadre officers. Then with the interested and eligible candidates, we fill up Class 1 posts first and then Class 2 posts. Some ministries delayed a lot sending us job requisition letters and now we have finalised the recruitment process of non-cadre officers in Class 1 and Class 2 posts," says Momtaz.

This complicated and lengthy bureaucratic

PERPECTIVE |

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QUALIFIED, BUT REJECTED

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

time due to an acute shortage of teachers in her school. Ayesha's school, Bhajna Monohorkhali Government Primary School, located in Patuakhali district, has 110 students in five grades. However, there are only three teachers to guide these 110 students. Ayesha and two of her colleagues have been struggling to keep the school running for the last two years. Since 2016, the school has been running without a headmaster; there are three vacant posts for teachers and one vacant post for an office assistant. Ayesha, the senior-most teacher of the school, is also the acting headmistress.

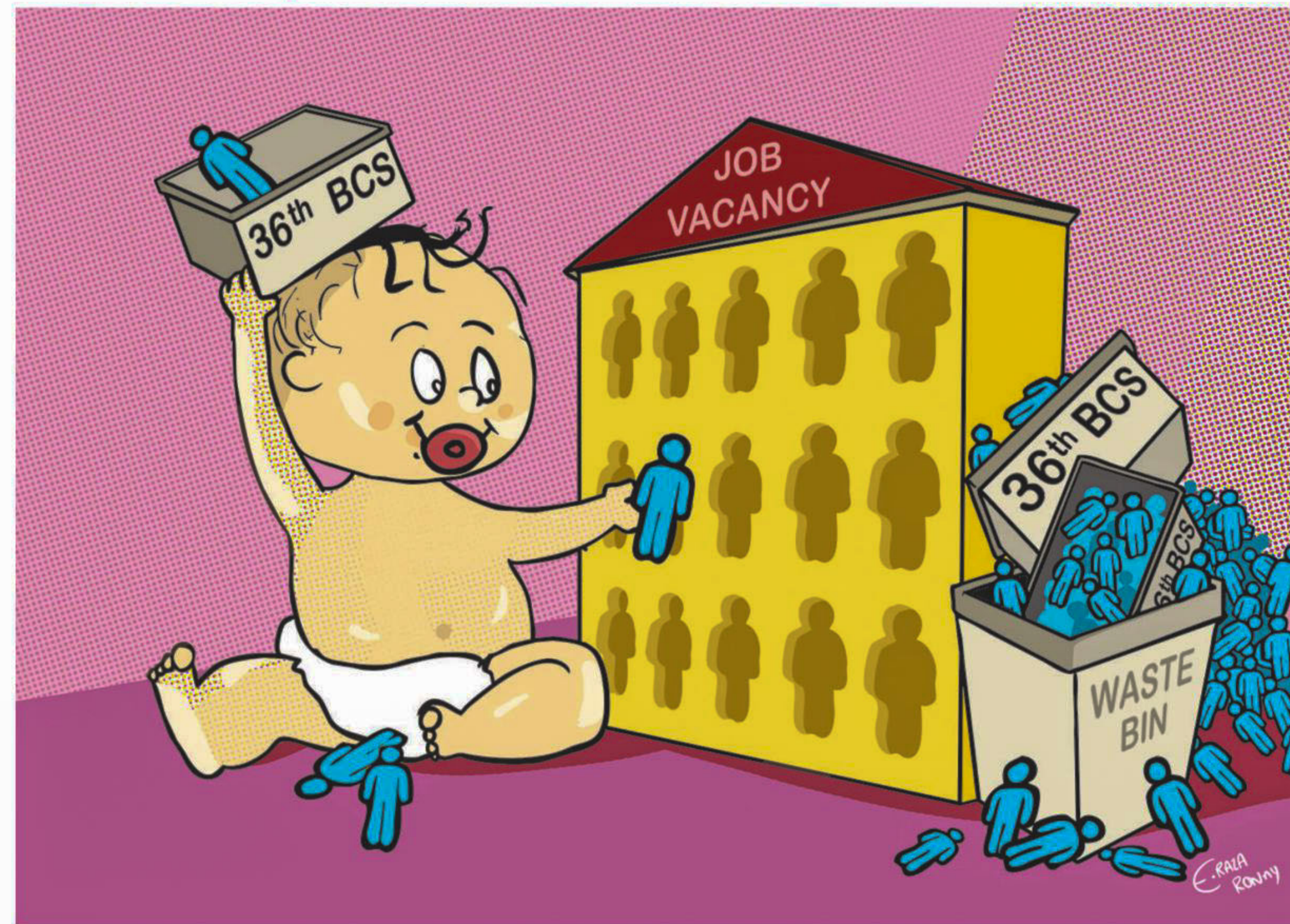
"As we have no headmaster, we couldn't organise many essential academic activities such as parents-teachers' meeting and sports and cultural festivals in the last two years. I have to suspend my classes at least seven days in every month as I have to go to the upazila headquarters to conduct administrative tasks as the headmaster in charge. Time and again, I have informed the upazila and district education office about the vacant posts but never got any positive reply," says Ayesha.

Ayesha's school is not an exception. According to Mostafizur Rahman, Minister for Primary and Mass Education, currently 21,000 posts of headmasters are vacant in the country's 64,000 primary schools. In addition, 32,000 posts of assistant teachers are also vacant in these primary schools. Meanwhile, thousands of eligible and enthusiastic candidates have been protesting for their right to get employed as headmasters of primary schools. However, bureaucratic red tape has created an impassable barrier in the employment of teachers, creating a crisis in the primary education sector.

These eligible and interested candidates have successfully passed all the phases of the 36th Bangladesh Civil Service Exam in which 2,11,326 examinees appeared and only 5633 of them succeeded. Among these 5633 successful candidates, Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) recommended that 2323 candidates be recruited in different cadre posts. Then, BPSC asked different ministries to send job requisition letters to fill up the vacant posts of Class 1 and Class 2 officers with the rest of the 3308 candidates.

According to Dr A F M Manzur Kadir, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, the ministry sent job requisition letters to BPSC mentioning that there were 4320 vacant positions of primary school headmasters which could be filled by the 36th BCS qualifiers. "We would like to fill these posts with BCS qualifiers. In this way, we shall get quality teachers in the primary schools which can greatly improve the primary education sector," says Dr Kadir.

However, BPSC's move to fill up these posts



CARTOON: E R RONNY

Educational qualification is not a barrier for recruiting primary school headmasters with BCS qualifiers because those who are eligible to attend the BCS exam are also eligible for the post of primary school headmaster.

limit for government jobs. We prepared for this exam for three years and got qualifying scores in all the phases. We hoped that finally we would be able to free ourselves from the curse of unemployment. But with this decision from BPSC, all our hopes have been crushed."

On the other hand, BPSC is arguing that qualifying in the BCS exam does not guarantee

qualification is not a barrier for recruiting primary school headmasters with BCS qualifiers because those who are eligible to attend the BCS exam are also eligible for the post of primary school headmaster. In this regard, Momtaz also points to the lengthy and complicated process of government recruitment.

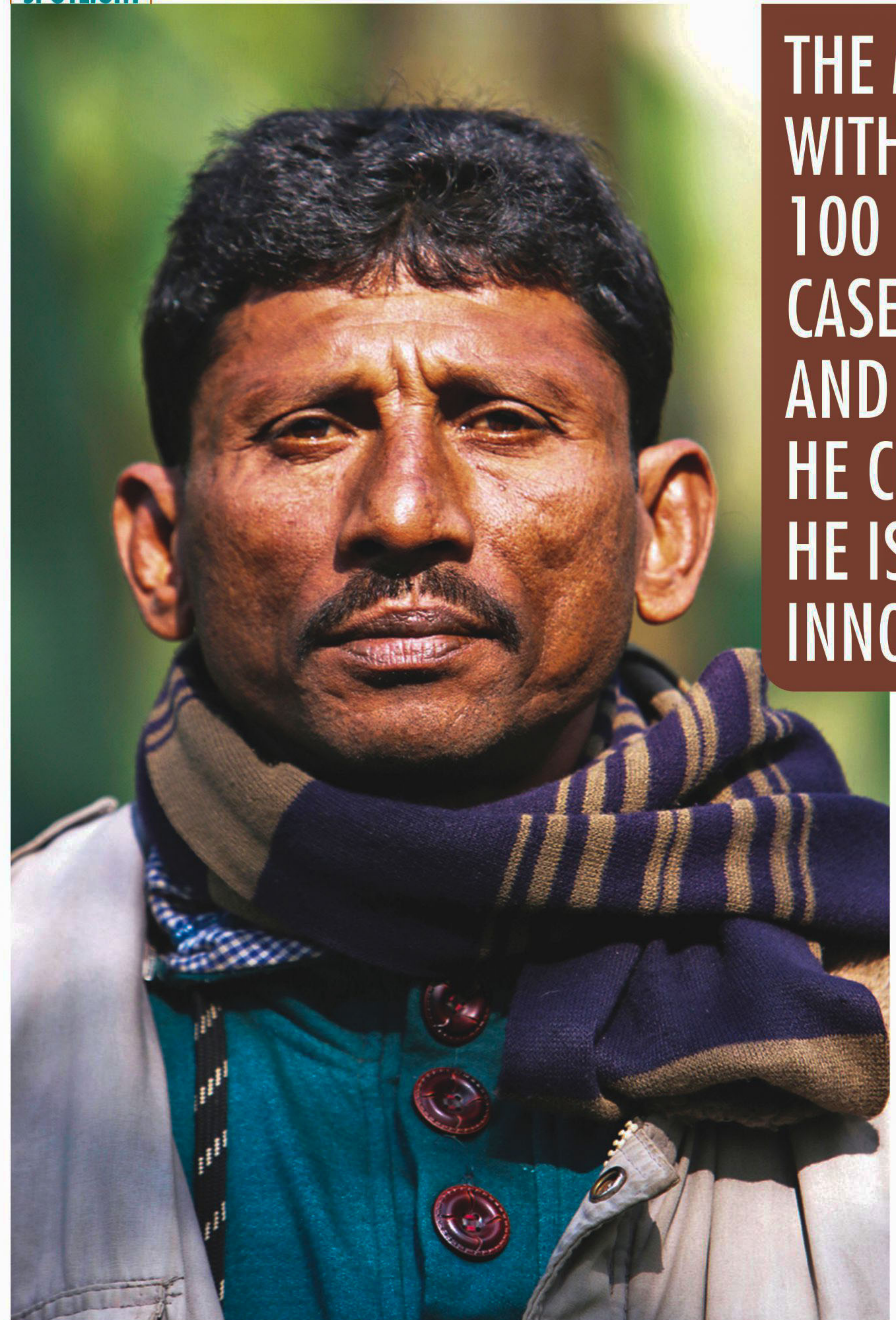
"Recruiting candidates in the non-cadre posts

process has meant that thousands of primary schools are struggling due to a shortage of teachers. Fortunately, the continuous demonstration of frustrated job seekers has resulted in the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education finally sending the job requisition letter to BPSC again to recruit 4017 primary school headmasters. According to Dr Kadir, "BPSC can recruit in these posts until publication of the final result of the 37th BCS exam. We have fulfilled our responsibility, but if BPSC doesn't take step to fill up these posts, we have nothing more to do."

As BPSC has finalised the recruitment for 1st class and 2nd class non-cadre posts leaving thousands of posts vacant, the fate of thousands of qualified candidates is now uncertain. Bangladesh's bureaucrats should realise that such procrastinated and complicated recruitment practices have not only deprived thousands of youths of their employment rights but also crippled a large number of primary schools like Ayesha's where disseminating quality education has become an impossible task.

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Hasan Ali

THE MAN WITH 100 FOREST CASES... AND WHY HE CLAIMS HE IS INNOCENT

PHILIP GAIN

Hasan Ali appeared at Tangail Forest Court on January 4, 2018 to take bail in a 'forest case' (no. 405) that was filed in 1998 for felling of trees. He had been charged in *absentia* on December 27, 2017. The court issued a warrant of arrest. On January 4, he secured a bail to stay out of jail.

Hasan Ali and his family of two wives, three daughters and two sons, are now permanent residents of Gachhabari village of Aronkhola union in Madhupur upazila. Nearly a hundred Bengali families settled in the part of Gachhabari village that eventually came to be known as Farm Para during the Pakistan era. Gachhabari, before the Bengali moved in, was a Garo village and the area was covered with pretty deep jungle. Today that has

PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

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