



JOB APPLICATION FEES ON THE RISE

Unbearable burden on unemployed youth

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

The decision to increase the job application fees for government jobs, except for cadre posts, has outraged the country's millions of job seekers who find it an additional burden on them, making their expenses heavier.

According to the new circular issued by the finance ministry on September 22, application fees for posts of different grades have been increased up to two to three times the previous rate.

For instance, the application fee for 9th-grade jobs has now been fixed at Tk 600. Previously, it was Tk 500, according to the national pay scale 2015.

However, the application fee for 10th-grade positions has been kept at Tk 500. There is no fixed application fee for positions from 1st to 8th grades as these are top ranking posts.

On the other hand, the fee for 11th to 16th-grade positions rose by Tk 100 to Tk 300. Now the applicants will have to pay Tk 300 as the fees for the 11th and 12th grades, and Tk 200 for the 13th to 16th grades.

Earlier, the application fee for 11th to 16th-grade positions was Tk 100, according to the finance ministry circular.

graduate who has been applying for government jobs for three years.

"After the pandemic, many government organisations are posting job circulars. Last month, I applied for four positions and had to pay around Tk 2,000 as application fees. I had to struggle a lot to collect this money as I have no income currently. Increasing application fees in such a time will prove to be a massive blow for us," he said.

Another jobseeker, Sumaya Khanam said apart from the application fees, they need to spend a huge amount of money for travel to take the recruitment tests.

"In August, I had to travel to Dhaka from my hometown Dinaipur three times to sit for those exams. I had to spend around Tk 15,000 that month just to travel to and stay in Dhaka to appear at the exams," she said.

There are several written exams coming up in November and December and application submission deadlines in October, she said.

"I am struggling to collect money for submitting applications in October while saving some for the exams in November and December. This type of recruitment system where unemployed people have to pay a hefty amount is unjust."

from grade 10 to grade 4. However, the application fee for all applicants was Tk 1,000.

Khulna Development Authority published a circular for 16 positions. For the positions of assistant engineer (9th grade) and sub-assistant engineer (10th grade), the application fee was Tk 700. For all other positions, the application fee was Tk 500.

On the other hand, Dhaka Power Distribution Company Limited (DPDC) will recruit 33 assistant engineers and the application fee it charged was Tk 1,500.

"If these state-run enterprises also increase the job application fees following the finance ministry's decision, it will be impossible for us to apply for many of these jobs. The government has been imposing an unbearable burden on us in the name of job application fees and recruitment exams," said Sumaya.

The finance ministry, however, claims that they have not increased the application fees, it was "adjusted" for the benefit of the job seekers.

Md Golam Mostofa, additional secretary (regulation) of the finance ministry, told The Daily Star, "Previously application fee for 9th-grade and 10th-grade jobs was the same. We have just slightly increased the fee for 9th-grade positions but did not increase the latter."

The application fee for positions of 11th to 16th grade was the same but their salary was not equal. "So, we have re-adjusted the application according to the grade of the positions in accordance with the pay scale," he said.

Golam Mostofa said the government does not intend to earn from the application fees. Even the application fees barely cover 10 percent of the expenditure required to arrange job exams.

"We take these fees as a token money from the job seekers so that they take the exams seriously."

Asked how this decision will be enforced and why the state-run enterprises have been exempted, he commented, "The finance ministry allocates budget for the relevant departments for arranging job exams. If they do not abide by the decision, they will not get the allocation for arranging exams."

"State-run enterprises are supposed to run on their own income. This is why we have exempted them from this measure," he added.

Experts, however, have opined against this step saying that the step would cause suffering for millions of job seekers and unemployed youths.

Former Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumder said, "We expected the government would decrease job application fees considering the current economic situation. Increasing application fees at this time when many people have been suffering from income loss due to the pandemic is not the appropriate step."

"There can be a fee for applying for government jobs but that fee has to be nominal and affordable for all citizens."

Paperless recruitment can make a difference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

AKM Fahim Mahroor, CEO and co-founder of Bdjobs.com, a leading career management website of Bangladesh said, "At present, many banks and private organisations are receiving and reviewing job applications through online platforms like Bdjobs.com. The submission process of the applications has become paperless and it saves a lot of money."

"Again," he added, "many private organisations including banks are conducting job exams and interviews through online platforms like Bdjobs.com. Even the interviews and written exams of 20,000 to 30,000 candidates are being conducted virtually through our website."

He opined that taking online exams and interviews will reduce the expenditures significantly and ensure better transparency in the recruitment process.

"Previously, banks used to spend Tk 300 to 400 per candidate to hold the job exams and interviews physically. Now, the banks who opted for online exams and interviews have to spend only Tk 15 to 20 per candidate. This ultimately saves a lot of money of the employers and employees as well as they don't have to travel or stay in another city just to attend the exams," said Fahim.

"The government can also go for online recruitment process and it will increase transparency and accountability. Why a candidate is selected and why a candidate will not be called for the interview, everything will be done in a systematic manner and will be remained documented."



Investment with no return

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The increase in the job application fees for government jobs will be taken as a justification for the further hike of application fees in the state-owned corporates and other entities, many of whom have already been charging some atrocious rates, said TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman.

"The decision fails to reflect the responsiveness of the authority to the already prevailing genuine and longstanding concerns of job seekers, aggravated by additional financial pressures they are currently in due to runaway cost of living," he told The Daily Star.

"The government does not also appear to realise that the overwhelming proportion of jobseekers, most of whom have to make multiple failed attempts to be recruited, and hence the fees they pay are investments with no return."

He added, "If the rationale behind the decision is streamlining the rates of public sector job applications, instead of arbitrary imposition, it should have been accompanied by transparent communication of specific principles drawn upon an in-depth analysis of implications for applicants and their families."



The finance ministry allocates budget for the relevant departments for arranging job exams. If they do not abide by the decision, they will not get the allocation for arranging exams.



The application fee for 17th to 20th-grade positions has doubled to Tk 100 from Tk 50.

The jobseekers, many of whom are unemployed, say the move will exert financial pressure on them. Most of them apply for these jobs several times; so they have to spend the additional amount without any return.

Even now, many applicants especially those who are from impoverished backgrounds find it extremely difficult to manage enough money to travel to and stay in Dhaka to appear for the job exams.

"Many of us may think that Tk 500-600 is an insignificant amount. Yes, it might be when you get a monthly salary. But, for unemployed youth like us, every penny matters a lot," said Md Tobarak Hossain, a National University

Again, jobseekers are apprehensive that the finance ministry's move will encourage public sector enterprises to increase their application fee as they have been exempted in the circular.

Job application fees set by these organisations are already much higher than the usual fees for other government jobs.

This correspondent analysed recently published 10 circulars of different public enterprises and found that application fees range from Tk 700 to over Tk 1,000.

For instance, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) published a circular for recruiting medical officers where the application fee was Tk 1,000.

Similarly, Rural Power Company Limited published a job circular for positions ranging

I am struggling to collect money for submitting applications in October while saving some for the exams in November and December. This type of recruitment system where unemployed people have to pay a hefty amount is unjust.