

'Only honest, competent leadership can fix public admin'

Firoz Mia, a public administration expert, is a former additional secretary at the Ministry of Public Administration and has authored several books on government service. In this interview with **Baharam Khan** of **The Daily Star**, he talks about the recently approved Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance and the protests that have erupted at the secretariat.

How do you view the protests by government employees centring the formulation of the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025?

I believe government employees are protesting because of negative experiences they have had in the past. Previously, there was also a law under which punitive action could be taken against employees without any fair investigation.

Can you please elaborate?

The newly formulated ordinance incorporates certain sections from the Government Servants (Special Provisions) Ordinance-1979, which remained in force until 2019. In the past, most of those who lost their jobs under this ordinance were low-ranking employees, who were mostly innocent in an ideal sense. Employee leaders or high-level officers didn't lose their jobs because they were politically influential. Based on these experiences, employees now fear misuse of the ordinance, and their concerns are not unfounded.

How different is the new ordinance from the 1979 one?

The newly formulated ordinance is more repressive than the 1979 one. So, the risk of its misuse is also higher. It contains numerous linguistic and legal flaws. For instance, while the previous ordinance provided for punishment on grounds of "creating dissatisfaction," in the new one, punishment can be imposed for "insubordination." If, say, an honest employee refuses to comply with the orders of a corrupt superior, and is then dismissed on grounds of insubordination, how can you justify it?

According to the new ordinance, even subordinate authorities can declare an accused either guilty or not guilty. This contradicts Article 135(l) of the Constitution.

Moreover, the ordinance does not provide for an impartial investigation process for the accused employee, increasing the risk of abuse. Authorities would be able to arbitrarily and whimsically dismiss anyone they choose. This is not acceptable.

Usually, women are not seen in protests by Secretariat employees. But this time many female employees have joined the demonstrations.

Yes, this ordinance could prove more dangerous for women. There is a risk that a morally corrupt officer may file an insubordination charge against a female subordinate who refuses to respond to his indecent advances. Therefore, women have reasons to be alarmed, and their feelings of insecurity are justified.

Are there other aspects of the ordinance that you find unreasonable?

In the civil service, before punishing an

employee, official notices are served, advertisements are published in newspapers, and notices are also sent to the accused's residence, giving them a specified period to respond. But the new ordinance introduces email as an alternative medium for serving

notices. But a person might not check their email for weeks, their email account could be hacked, or they may be in a place with no internet access.

If the authorities take advantage of this to dismiss or penalise an employee, would that be right or humane? If policymakers ignore such underlying issues while drafting laws or ordinances, how will ordinary government employees feel secure?

Doesn't this reflect poorly on those who drafted the ordinance?

Without a doubt, it reflects their inadequacy. Such mistakes are inevitable if the work is rushed or if experienced professionals are not consulted. If parliament were in session today, many of these details would perhaps have been debated. But with no active parliament, laws are being amended haphazardly. Moreover, in some cases, even when experts are consulted, senior officers cause trouble

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by trying to flaunt their intellect. During my service, I've seen many senior officers who knew little about legislation but interfered in such matters just because of their seniority. They think juniors won't consider them competent unless they show off their wisdom.



Firoz Mia

The ongoing protest is mainly being led by lower-grade Secretariat employees. Why are cadre officers silent?

Laws are enforced mostly on the weak, which is why the weak are protesting. Cadre officers are also backing this movement, but they will not come forward publicly. Another reason is that cadre officers themselves investigate cases of corruption or misconduct involving other cadre officers, and they rarely punish their own. This is one of the reasons behind the current decline of our civil administration.

But government employees have also been frequently involved in questionable activities—don't we need strict laws for dealing with such activities and employees?

There is no denying that government employees have played a role in causing public sufferings through corruption and irregularities. Especially after the

mass uprising on August 5, the way some officials held the public hostage is completely unacceptable. However, with competent leadership, I think this could have been handled better. But the current administration has failed in that regard, which is why they are resorting to repressive laws—an approach that cannot effectively manage the civil service crisis.

Then what is the way to handle it?

Strict enforcement of existing regulations and appointment of competent and credible officers—that's the way forward. Only after that can we consider stricter laws or ordinances, but those must not be repressive. Employees must be given the opportunity to defend themselves properly.

But are government employees allowed to protest like this?

In principle, they are not supposed to. But when the government tries to impose repressive laws and regulations, the legitimacy of such protests emerges. So, the solution is not suppression. Capable and honest officers must be appointed who can lead, and they must be allowed to work independently without being bogged down by any external or political influence.

What would be your final message?

As I've said before, appoint officers with integrity. At the same time, there must not be any room for political or vested interests interfering in their work. If the authorities believe that only those officers and employees who follow their orders are "good," then the administration will not function as expected. The government must ensure that public servants are acting in accordance with laws and are not engaging in corruption. Only then will the administration be set right.

Tackling joblessness requires thinking out of the box



SELIM JAHAN
is former director of the Human Development Report Office under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and lead author of the Human Development Report.

The issues currently dominating economic discussions in Bangladesh are stagnant growth, high inflation, reduced investments, and apprehensions about a floating exchange rate, among others. But one particular topic that often does not feature in debates surrounding the country's economic challenges is joblessness, despite the alarming level it has reached of late. And this has important economic, social and political implications.

Today, about 27.4 lakh people in Bangladesh are jobless and the unemployment rate in the country stands at 4.63 percent. During the first half of the outgoing fiscal year, more than 20 lakh people lost their jobs. It goes without saying that because of the way the phenomenon of unemployment is defined and enumerated, the official unemployment figures are underestimations of the real situation on the ground, and thus, the actual joblessness in Bangladesh is much higher than the official figure. For example, the official unemployment among women was reported to be 3.6 percent, but the real figure has been estimated and reported at 9.7 percent.

Several factors have contributed to the high joblessness. First is the sluggish economic growth. Bangladesh's economy has grown by 3.97 percent during the current fiscal year. Excluding the pandemic years, this is the slowest GDP growth rate that the country experienced over the past 34 years. The agricultural sector grew by 1.79 percent during the current fiscal year, nearly half of the 3.30 percent growth rate the sector enjoyed during FY2023-24. The agricultural sector faced significant challenges, primarily due to severe flooding. The service sector growth during the same period dropped from 5.09 to 4.51 percent because of shrinking consumer demand, reduced industrial production, and declining exports in some sectors. As the agricultural and service sectors account for 82.6

percent of the total employment in Bangladesh's economy, the decline in the growth rate of these sectors contributed to the increasing joblessness in the country.

The second factor which has accelerated joblessness in the economy is inadequate investment and slow investment growth. The total investment-GDP ratio in Bangladesh has fallen from 30.7 percent last fiscal year to 29.38 percent this year. The corresponding figures for private investments are 23.96 percent and 22.48 percent respectively. The reasons for declines in private investments are uncertainties in the economy, political instability, high inflation, tighter monetary policy, alarming law and order situation, labour unrest, and absence of necessary reforms in various sectors of the economy. For example, in the absence of a clear election roadmap, investors—both local and foreign—are hesitating to come forward to invest more in the Bangladeshi economy. Foreign direct investments (FDIs) are also not forthcoming. These are dampening both new investments and reinvestments necessary for running the existing plants. As a result, employment creation has decelerated.

High inflation is also a deterring factor and negatively impacts investments in three ways: first, by raising the cost of economic operations; second, by reducing consumer demand; and lastly, by making credit difficult to get. Since inflation made the factors of production costly, investors were discouraged from investing. Similarly, on the demand side, as inflation reduced consumer demands, the incentive for investors to invest went down too. Bangladesh Bank pursued a tighter monetary policy by maintaining higher bank rates in order to tackle high inflation in the economy. All these have had dampening effects on investments. With high inflation, there were lower investments and fewer business

expansions. This ultimately led to fewer job creation and higher joblessness in the economy.

Lower investments in the economy, accelerated by economic instabilities and political uncertainties led to insufficient and shrinking job opportunities and also reduced entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition, the skill mismatch in the labour markets resulted in increased unemployment. In Bangladesh, the educational system has not been producing graduates with the skills required by emerging labour markets. For example, computer and digital education and experience in this field are now a must in the labour market. But many people lack computer and digital literacy and thus cannot find jobs. The quality of education is also a factor.

Institutional factors like corruption, non-adherence to the rule of meritocracy have also contributed to joblessness in the economy.

The fundamental question, then, is what needs to be done to create employment in Bangladesh.

Measures should be taken both at the policy and institutional level. At the policy level, the first thing that is needed is thinking out of the box. The pursuance of traditional vocational education and training would do some good, but it is inadequate to tackle the challenge of joblessness in today's world. The future world of work is changing fast with digital revolution, where traditional ideas of job creation have become obsolete. Both the content and the modus operandi of the future world of work would require new skill sets and different work organisation and processes.

To do that, first, an assessment profile of the kind of skills currently being developed in Bangladesh must be prepared, identifying areas of opportunities and deficits. In preparing such a mapping, the current and upcoming human resource demands of domestic entrepreneurs must be kept in mind. A comprehensive list of future job opportunities and the skills required for those jobs should be prepared. In that context, the new realities of digital revolution must be kept in mind. This assessment would also treat skilled migration as a national priority. Combining these three, a job mapping plan for the country should be formulated and that plan must be made consistent with the overall economic plan of

the country. The existing National Employment Policy 2022 needs to be comprehensively revised and updated to reflect the prospects, needs and constraints of the current labour market and the future nature of work.

Second, the educational structure of the country including academic programmes, syllabuses, teaching and learning methods, and educational facilities must be evaluated. The objective of this assessment would be to determine whether the country's current educational system can meet its human resource demand as outlined in the job mapping plan. In light of this, the entire educational system must be overhauled, where science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) would be at the core, along with information technology and artificial intelligence.

Third, in order to upgrade work skills continuously, necessary training must be pursued to ensure that the knowledge is up-to-date, modern, timely and relevant. Specific programmes may be undertaken to improve skills. These include strengthening industry-academic partnerships, developing on-the-job mentorship, organising affordable in-house training, offering skill-based incentives and bonuses,

providing language training programmes, utilising government skill development programmes, and partnering with local NGOs and training providers. Universities must be involved in research and innovation.

Even though the issue of joblessness is not discussed at par with other challenges of the economy, it remains the elephant in the room. The issue of joblessness should be at the centre of the growth strategy so that Bangladesh's economy may pursue an employment-led growth, rather than a growth-led employment strategy. The central bank may also think of dual targets involving both inflation and employment. When it comes to tackling joblessness, we have to think out of the box as yesterday's strategies would not be able to solve tomorrow's problems.

Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh

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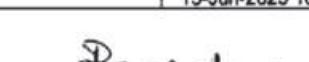
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Date: 29-05-2025

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify for all concerns that e-Tenders is invited and published on 29 May 2025 in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for procurement of works for the following Tenders. Interested persons/firms can see details by visiting the web site www.eprocure.gov.bd.

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Tender Reference No.	Name of Work	Date & Time
01	1121272	e-GP/EE/CSRD/OTM/73/2024-2025	Supply of different types of first moving spare parts for Road rollers under 1st Line Workshop Sub-Division Dohazari of Chittagong South Road Division during the year 2024-2025.	Last Selling: 15-Jun-2025 15:00 Closing: 15-Jun-2025 16:10
02	1121273	e-GP/EE/CSRD/OTM/74/2024-2025	Trimming tree branches including removing and clearing at Different (P) Km of Paliya-Boalkhali Road (Z-1059) Under Chattogram South Road Division during the year 2024-2025.	Last Selling: 15-Jun-2025 15:00 Closing: 15-Jun-2025 16:15
03	1121274	e-GP/EE/CSRD/OTM/75/2024-2025	Trimming tree branches including removing and clearing at Different (P) Km of Dhaka-Jatrabari-Cumilla(Moinamoti)-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Road (N-1) Under Chattogram South Road Division during the year 2024-2025.	Last Selling: 15-Jun-2025 15:00 Closing: 15-Jun-2025 16:20
04	1121275	e-GP/EE/CSRD/OTM/76/2024-2025	Trimming tree branches including removing and clearing at Different (P) Km of Kalurghat-Manshatek Road (N-107) Under Chattogram South Road Division during the year 2024-2025.	Last Selling: 15-Jun-2025 15:00 Closing: 15-Jun-2025 16:20


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