

# **Civil Service Recruitment Policy in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis**

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**Abstract:** The present paper deals with the policy taken in Bangladesh for direct recruitment to civil service especially the cadre services called Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS). It also deals with how far this policy is consistent with the principle of equality in job opportunity and efficiency. The paper reveals that sound recruitment policy for civil service does not exist in Bangladesh. Sound recruitment policy gives emphasis on merit rather than any other considerations. But in recruitment to the civil service of Bangladesh, merit is not given due importance. Majority posts of civil service are reserved for preferred groups through quota. The paper recommends some suggestions to get rid of this situation in order to create equality in job opportunity with efficiency for better governance in the country.

### **Introduction**

#### ***Civil Service***

Civil service of a country generally includes all permanent functionaries of government which distinctly excludes defence service, although some civil servants work in defence ministry and its various departments. A member of civil service is not also a holder of political or judicial office. The civil servants of a state collectively called civil service. According to Finer civil service is a professional body of officials, permanent, paid and skilled. Policy formulation is the function of cabinet/ministry, but policy implementation, the main aspect of development is the function of the civil servants. Although policy formulation is the jurisdiction of cabinet/ministry, it depends largely on civil servants for the data of policy formulation. According to a British writer, in ninety nine cases out of one hundred, the ministers simply accept the views of civil servants, and sign their names on dotted line. So a state may run without ministers, but it cannot run a day without civil servants (Ahmad, 2003:455). Here lies the importance of recruiting the best talents for civil service in order to make public sector a relevant, dynamic and powerful force of change.

#### ***Recruitment***

Recruitment is the process of searching for prospective employees and stimulating them to apply for jobs in the organization (Flippo and Edwin 1984: 141). No element of the career service system is more important than the recruitment policy” (Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel, 1935:37, quoted in Stall 1962:51). Recruitment is the cornerstone of the whole personnel structure. Unless recruitment policy is soundly conceived, there can be of little hope of building a first rate staff (Stall, 1962: 51). Broadly, there are two major methods for recruitment to civil service: (a) merit system through competitive examination and (b) spoils system. Under the typical civil service law, the central personnel agency commonly called Public Service Commission is responsible to conduct competitive examination. Spoils system (also known as a patronage system) is an informal practice where a political party, after winning an election, gives government jobs to its voters as a reward for working towards victory, and as an incentive to keep working for the party—as opposed to a system of awarding offices on the basis of merit, independent of political activity.

## ***Policy***

A policy means deliberate plan to guide a decision in order to achieve outcome. Public policy is a course of action or inaction taken by the government. In a democratic polity public policy is generally embodied in the constitution, legislative acts and executive orders when legislature is not in session. Policy cycle has the following stages:

- (i) Identification of problem/agenda for which policy is taken:
- (ii) Policy formulation;
- (iii) Adoption;
- (iv) Implementation and
- (v) Evaluation.

## **Bangladesh at a Glance**

Bangladesh was a province of united Pakistan from 1947-1971 and became independent in December 1971 following a nine-month war of liberation. Literally, the word 'Bangladesh' means the land of Bangla. In fact, Bangladesh is a country of Bengali speaking people consisting of more than 98 percent of total population. Minorities include as many as 13 tribes numbering about 1 million, with the Chakmas being most numerous. Like linguistic homogeneity, there is also religious homogeneity (Wahhab 2002:37). Muslims constitute 89 percent of population. Bangladesh is one of the largest deltas of the world with an area of 157,579 sq. km. with 150 million people. By size it stands 89<sup>th</sup> in the world, but in population it is 8<sup>th</sup> in the world and 5<sup>th</sup> in Asia. Male female ratio is 105:100 and literacy is 63 percent of which male is majority. But it is encouraging that the enrollment of girls in schools and colleges (1-X11 levels) has become almost equal to the boys (Wahhab 2008: 3). This means in a short period of time the gap between man woman literacy in Bangladesh will come down to zero level. Life expectancy is 65 years for male and 67 years for female. Per capita income is \$566. But labor force in the country is poor especially from women.

Bangladesh is a unitary country with parliamentary form of government. Administratively Bangladesh is divided into 6 divisions and each division is divided into districts, called zilas. There are 64 districts and each district is divided into sub-districts called upazilas (481). Every upazila consists of several unions (4,466). There are local governments at upazila and union levels. The urban communities are led by city corporations and municipalities.

The people of Bangladesh prefer to join civil service because the private sectors are not so developed and hence government is the biggest employer in the country.

## **Civil Service in Bangladesh**

Government employees in Bangladesh are vertically belonging to four categories, namely Class 1 Officers, Class 11 Officers, Class 111 employees and Class 1V employees. The officers are also classified as gazetted officers and non-gazetted officers. The officers whose appointment, posting, transfer, promotion and the similar are notified in government gazette, they are known as gazetted officers. All Class 1 officers and some of the Class 11 officers are treated as gazetted officers. Of the Class 1 officers, some belong to the cadre services.

Cadre service means the organization of civil servants in well defined groups, services or cadres. Cadre service generally exists in the countries with the British colonial heritage. Cadre services are constituted under law with a number of position or structure and recruitment and promotion rules. On the other hand, non cadre services are mostly based on position, with no definite structure of mobility either horizontally or vertically. A cadre system entails organization of civil servants into semi-functional occupational groups or cadres. Cadre service in Bangladesh was first officially recognized in 1981, when Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment Rules of that year was introduced. Bangladesh Civil Service more popularly known by its acronym BCS is the elite service in the country. BCS inherited the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), which was the legacy of Indian Civil Service (ICS), the most distinguished civil service in the world. Currently there are 28 cadres in the BCS. Some cadres are general, such as BCS (Administration), BCS (Foreign Affairs), BCS (Police), BCS (Food), BCS (Customs & Accounts), BCS (Information), etc. and others are professional/technical, such as BCS (Health), BCS (General Education), BCS (Technical Education), BCS (Economics), BCS (Fisheries) and the similar. Among the general cadres, BCS (Administration) is the steering wheel round which entire administration of Bangladesh revolves. It is like IAS (Indian Administrative Service) in India and CSP (Civil Service of Pakistan) in Pakistan. The first appointment of a BCS (Administration) officer starts as Assistant Commissioner in the rank of Assistant Secretary. The BCS (Administration) officers in hierarchical order are Assistant Secretary, Senior Assistant Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Joint Secretary, Additional Secretary and Secretary, the highest civil post in Bangladesh government excepting two—Cabinet Secretary and Principal Secretary. Originally there were 30 cadres in the BCS. In 1990 BCS (Secretariat) was merged to BCS (Administration). In November 2007 lower judiciary in Bangladesh was separated from the executive. As a result BCS (Judiciary) has become a separate service known as Judicial Service and it is no more a cadre of BCS.

### **Legal Basis for BCS Recruitment Policy**

The constitution of Bangladesh has granted equal employment opportunities for citizens. The constitution declares “There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic” (Article 29 [1]). “No citizen shall, on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office in the service of the Republic” (Article 29 [2]). However under clause (3) of the same Article, the constitution has provided certain exceptions that read: “Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from (a) making special provision, in favor of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic; (b) giving effect to any law which makes provision for reserving appointments relating to any religious or denominational institution to person of that religion or denomination; (c) reserving for members of one sex any class of employment or office on the ground that it is considered by its nature to be unsuited to members of the opposite sex (Article 29 [3]).

The above constitutional provisions indicate that civil service recruitment policy in Bangladesh is the admixture of merit and quota. It should be noted here that recruitment policy was first introduced in Bangladesh by an executive order in September 1972 called Interim Recruitment Rules 1972 before the constitution came into operation in December

of that year. The recruitment to civil service in Bangladesh may be of various natures. They are: direct appointment through competitive examination, appointments by promotion, appointments by transfer and appointments on ad hoc basis and then regularization. Here we shall deal with direct recruitment to the officers giving emphasis to cadre services.

### **Predominance of Quota in BCS Recruitment Policy**

However, in the light of Article 29 of constitution and the executive order of 1972, the government framed various rules regarding the recruitment to civil service. Changing recruitment policies over a period have been shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Recruitment Policy for BCS including other Class 1 & 11 Services**  
**(Figures in percentages)**

Recruitment Policy	1972	1976	1985 (till date)
<b>Merit</b> (outside district quota)	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>45</b>
Freedom fighters	30	30	
War affected women	10	10	
District quota	40	20	
a. Wards of freedom fighters			30
b. women			10
c. Tribal			05
d. District merit			10
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

Source: Compilation from different Rules

Table 1 clearly indicates that since after independence of Bangladesh in 1971 till to date recruitment policy to civil service including BCS has been dominating by different types of quota. However quota is distributed among the candidates on the basis of merit in their respective groups. After independence of Bangladesh till 1976 only 20 percent of civil officers were recruited on merit. In 1976 recruitment on merit increased from 20 to 40 percent and in 1985 merit became 45 percent which is still going on. In other words, from 1985 till to date for 24 years there has been no change in merit policy for civil service recruitment.

It may be mentioned that in the case of Class 111 and 1V employees, there is no national merit policy and they are recruited district-wise. Of the employees 30 percent are reserved for freedom fighters/their wards, 15 percent for women, 10 percent for orphan and disabled, 10 percent for Ansars and VDPs, 5 percent for tribal people; and the rest 30 percent are reserved for general district merit. The main argument for not prescribing merit in the case of Class 111 & 1V employees is that their jobs are unskilled and it is very difficult to measure the merits of candidates for such jobs.

## **Agency for BCS Recruitment**

Bangladesh Public Service Commission, shortly known as PSC is a constitutional body (Articles 137-141), like its predecessors in British India and United Pakistan. The constitution has assigned PSC to conduct tests and examinations for the selection of suitable persons for appointment to the services of the Republic. The PSC is also empowered to advise President in framing recruitment rules, promotion and other matters related to civil service. The chairman and members of PSC are appointed by the President with the advice of Prime Minister and their tenure is five years or attain the age of 65 years whichever is earlier. Currently the PSC consists of a chairman and 14 members.

The constitution provides for establishing one or more PSCs. Accordingly after independence of Bangladesh, two type of PSC was constituted. The PSC (First) meant for the recruitment to Class 1 officers and PSC (Second), Class 11 officers. But the two commissions were merged into a single one in 1977 through the PSC Ordinance of that year; and the number of members was fixed between 6 (minimum) to 15 (maximum) including chairman. Before 1982 no competitive examinations, in present sense, were held in Bangladesh. Civil servants were then recruited either only with interview or with short written examinations and interview by the PSC. But majority of the officers were appointed on ad hoc basis and latter they were regularized by PSC. Regular competitive examinations began to hold since 1982 when BCS Recruitment Rules 1981 was introduced. From 1982 to 2006, the PSC conducted 27 BCS examinations, though the result of the last one is still withheld for political reason. Written examination of 28<sup>th</sup> BCS was completed in April 2009 and the preliminary examination of 29<sup>th</sup> BCS was held on 14 August 2009. Of the total 27 BCS examinations, 14 were general i. e. for all cadres and the rest were special meant for only one cadre.

## **Policy Implementation: BCS Recruitment Process**

BCS recruitment process consists of several steps that are stated below:

- a) MCQ preliminary examination;
- b) written examination;
- c) viva;
- d) result publication for selected candidates;
- e) medical test;
- f) police verification; and finally
- g) appointment.

### **Preliminary Examination:**

The MCQ preliminary examination is a screening test of 100 marks on Bangla, English, General Knowledge, Bangladesh and International Affairs, General Science and Technology, Mathematical Reasoning and Mental Ability and Everyday Science.

### **Written Examination**

According to Second Schedule of BCS Recruitment Rule 1981, BCS examination consisted of 1,600 marks. But it was reduced to 900 marks in 1984; and again it was

increased to 1000 (Ali, 2007:61-62), which is still going on. However the subjects and marks of BCS examination are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Showing the Subjects of BCS Written Examination and Viva along with Marks**

Subjects for general cadres	Marks	Subjects for professional/technical cadres	Marks
General Bangla	200	General Bangla	100
General English	200	General English	200
Bangladesh Affairs	200	General English	200
International Affairs	100	International Affairs	100
Mathematical Reasoning and Mental Ability	100	Mathematical Reasoning and Mental Ability	100
General Science & Technology	100	Two Papers for post Related subject	200
Viva	100	Viva	100
Total	1000	Total	1000

Source: <http://www.google.com.bd/search?hl=bn&q=general+infor%3ABCS+Examination&meta=&q=o&oq=>

Generally, the respective ministries, directorates, divisions, departments and statutory bodies inform the PSC about the number of vacant posts through the Ministry of Establishment (MOE). The PSC through the national newspapers invites applications for the vacant posts. The eligible candidates are asked to appear at a preliminary examination of 100 marks to drop out the less qualified candidates. The applicants who qualify preliminary examination are invited to appear at a written examination consisting of 1000 marks including 200 marks for viva and psychological test. Recently marks of viva has been reduced to 100 and 100 marks of a written subject was increased (Table 2). The candidates obtaining 50 percent marks in written test are qualified for viva. The minimum qualifying marks for viva is 40 percent. If a candidate fails in viva, he/she will not be considered for final selection. The merit list is prepared on the basis of written and viva marks. After completing merit list, the candidates are selected for different types of quota. The PSC sends the final list of selected candidates to MOE with recommendation for appointment to the vacancies. Police verification and medical check-up of the selected candidates is arranged by MOE respectively with the support of Home Affairs Ministry and Health Ministry. Final appointment is given by MOE through notification.

### **Policy Evaluation and Recommendations**

**Reformation of PSC:** Bangladesh is unitary country consisting of 150 million people. It is neither possible for a central government located at Dhaka to serve this huge number of population properly nor it is easy for a single PSC to recruit officials in time for the administration of the country. In addition to recruitment, PSC has to perform other functions as well. Consequently it is almost impossible on the part a single PSC to complete lengthy process of competitive examinations in time. Hence delay is common. According to a study, average time spent for a general BCS examination was 24.75 months and for special 14 months (Transparent International Bangladesh, 2007: 73). This indicates that a single PSC is not enough for holding BCS examination regularly and in

time. This paves the plea for government to recruit officials on ad hoc and it becomes obligation for PSC to regularize them, whether efficient or inefficient.

Under the circumstances, for better services to the peoples well as for good governance we propose federal government for Bangladesh consisting of six provinces in the place of existing 6 divisions (for details see Wahhab 2006). There shall be two PSCs. One is central PSC responsible to recruit officers of two categories, namely All Bangladesh Services for center and provinces; and central service meant for only center. The other is provincial PSC meant for recruiting officers for provincial administration. If not possible to create provinces, the present single PSC should be divided into PSC (First) and PSC (Second) like the earlier. The PSC (First) will recruit all cadres of BCS including other Class 1 officers; and PSC (Second) Class 11 officers. Otherwise, the present situation will deteriorate more and more; and regular and timely recruitment will not be possible for smooth administration in the country.

Since the inception of PSC, with a few exceptions, the chairmen and members were appointed on political considerations. As a result there are allegations of recruiting candidates aligned to the ruling party. In a democratic country like Bangladesh, political consideration can not be avoided totally, but the appointment of chairman and members of an institution like PSC must be from among the persons of high integrity, strong moral courage, personality and commitment with sufficient knowledge and experience on administration.

**Abolition of Quota System:** The quota policy as enshrined in the constitution is an exception for the advancement of backward sections in the society. Hence quota in no way can supersede the universal principle of merit for ensuring equal employment opportunities for all citizens without any discrimination. So quota of 80-55 percent as practiced in Bangladesh with different executive orders/rules is against the spirit of constitution. Since after liberation in 1971 till date majority posts of the civil services have reserved for the people of preferred groups under quota. Moreover, quota has always been implemented without transparency. It is surprising that that the appointments under quota have never made public either by PSC or by MOE in official document/gazette. The PSC annual reports do not provide adequate information on the appointments under quota.

Quota may be necessary for the advancement of backward sections in the society, but it can never continue for indefinite period as is going on in Bangladesh. Due to quota policy relatively poor caliber officials get entry into the civil service and long term bad impact of quota system is evident in the civil service of Bangladesh. So we propose to abolish quota in civil service recruitment excepting for tribal people (5%) but not for Chakmas who on the average are financially better off than the general people of Bangladesh; and also their literacy is higher around 75 percent and literacy in Bangladesh is 63 percent. Thus Chakmas in no criterion belong to backward section in Bangladesh.

The 30 percent quota for the wards of freedom fighters “though sanctioned by a wave of sympathy and gratitude has not a legal leg to stand on unless the beneficiaries proved to

be disadvantageous (Khan and Kazi 2008: i). If we really want help the wards of freedom fighters we should ensure their better education by providing stipend as we already did for female education which has yielded good results. As for women quota, it may be said that civil officers are mainly recruited from the graduates of universities. There is no female quota for admission to the universities in Bangladesh. Both male and female students get admission to the universities on merit. A large number of female students are reading in the universities. They are doing well in the university education as our experience shows. Similarly there is no female quota in appointing university teachers. Both female and male teachers are appointed on merit. So we find no justification of female quota in civil service recruitment (Wahhab 2008: 10). For the less developed districts, quota is not a proper solution; rather government should take measures to improve the schools and colleges so that the students of these districts come out with capability to compete with the students from developed districts. In short quota system has created a negative impression among the people because merit is not given due importance in recruiting officers, and thus causes deterioration of the quality of services delivered by them. If quota is unavoidable, it may continue in recruitment to Class 11 officers and in no way in the case BCS recruitment.

**Abolition of MCQ Preliminary Examination:** One of the causes for lengthy process of BCS examination is a separate preliminary examination to screen out the less qualified applicants. Screening out of less qualified candidates is essential because of a large number of applicants. As for example, in recent preliminary examination of 29<sup>th</sup> BCS examination held on August 14, 2009, there were 1, 23,745 applicants for 1,581 post (The *Shamokal*, a daily Bengali news paper, August 14, 2009). It is difficult for a single PSC, to conduct the written examination of such a huge number of applicants all over the country. Moreover, one hour examination of MCQ test is not enough and proper method to drop out the less qualified applicants (See the preliminary examination questions in the *Naya Diganta* dated August 15, 2009). Because, a good candidate with good results through out his entire academic career incidentally may cut a sorry figure in one hour examination. On the other hand, incidentally a weak candidate, who could not achieve good results through out his past career, may do better in this examination. So we propose to abolish MCQ preliminary examination. In place of MCQ preliminary examination, past examination marks of academic career may be considered to drop out the less qualified applicants. This is an easy way which, not only saves time but it is also an effective method to drop out less qualified candidates without any corruption.

**Consideration of Academic Marks with Written Test:** The list of selected candidates for viva is prepared on the basis of marks of written examination only. It is unfortunate that through out the entire process of BCS examination, past academic records of applicants are totally overlooked. So we propose to add the marks obtained by the candidates in their academic career with the marks of written examination to prepare the list for viva and the ratio should be 50:50. This not only ensures justice but it minimizes corruptions including bribery as alleged against BCS examinations.

**Short List for Viva:** Another cause of delay of BCS recruitment process is the long list of candidates for viva. Viva of a BCS examination takes 4-5 months. As for example in 27<sup>th</sup> BCS examination for 1774 posts, 16,342 were selected for viva were selected for

viva i. e, for 1 post about 10 candidates (*The Daily Star* dated May 4, 2007). We think for each post only three candidates should be selected for viva.

**Stopping of Ad Hoc Appointments:** Since after liberation a large number of civil servants were recruited on ad hoc basis resulting inefficiency in administration and politicization of civil service. In presence of PSC we find no justification of ad hoc appointments. But it is still going on. Recently the Prime Minister ordered appointments on ad hoc basis to the vacant posts of civil service including 6,000 physicians under Health Ministry skipping the process of PSC on the plea of hampering the activities of ministries and divisions due to shortage of man power. All dailies published the news on 10 July 2009. We think this cancerous act of ad hoc appointment is a clear violation of merit system and hence it should be stopped for efficient administration in order to ensure good governance.

### **Concluding Remarks: Political Will**

In fine it may be said if the recommendations stated above are implemented, we can expect an impartial and efficient civil service for better governance in the country. This is, however, largely dependent on the political will. The government and opposition should be united on the issue. Civil society can play an important role in this regard.

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