

## Direct Recruitment in the Cadre Services in Bangladesh: An Overview

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**Abstract:** The efficiency of government depends to a large extent on its personnel. And to build up an efficient personnel system, an ideal recruitment, which is the best of its kind, is a prerequisite. But it is very frustrating that long after thirty-three years of independence we have not yet formulated a sound recruitment system. The system of the examination, the syllabus, the distributions of posts etc. are yet full of various demerits. And as a result many bright candidates are deprived from entering the civil service. To build up an efficient civil service system, it is now high time to take required actions so that the real bright and meritorious ones can enter the civil service.

**Key words :** Recruitment, cadre service and bangladesh

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### INTRODUCTION

Recruitment is the corner stone of the civil service. Of all the variables affecting the performance of a government bureaucracy, none is as universally important as the caliber of its personnel. A bureaucracy's operating effectiveness is likely to be severely curtailed unless competent and dedicated people are recruited. Therefore, the way of recruiting and the process of retaining such people becomes a task of the highest priority for all bureaucracies. Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan in 1971. In Bangladesh thousands of civil servants are recruited in various cadres almost each year. Since independence thousands of civil servants are recruited in various cadres almost every year. But it is very painful that long after thirty-four years, we are not yet able to develop a sound recruitment system in the civil service. The main problem of recruitment in our country in simple terms is how to unite equality of opportunity with efficiency.

This study is an attempt to discuss briefly the process of direct recruitment in the civil service through open competitive examination that is the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Examination and simultaneously to identify the loopholes in the recruitment system as well as some suggestions to improve the present situation.

### MATERIALS AND METHOD

This Study is not empirical but descriptive in nature. It is basically based on the review of secondary literature including books, journals, articles, government documents and newspapers. Relevant information was also collected through internet browsing.

**Conceptual clarification:** Recruitment is the process of searching for prospective employees and stimulating them to apply for jobs in the organization<sup>[1]</sup>. It is the process of attracting qualified for jobs in the public sector. Recruitment is an important personnel activity because it determines the nature of the applicant pool from which new employees are selected (Klingner, 1980:135). In most current practices, recruitment begins with a personnel requisition in essence or statement of the intention to hire, combine with a reference to the job description and job specifications<sup>[2]</sup>.

Cadre is the distinct functional sub-division of the government bureaucracy. Rule 5 (7) of the Bangladesh Service Rules part 1 defines cadre as follows-Cadre means the strength of a service or a part of a service sanctioned as a separate unit. Each cadre consists of a certain number of posts. The strength of each cadre of Bangladesh Civil service has been laid down in the composition and cadre rules of the respective cadres<sup>[3]</sup>. At present there are twenty- nine cadres in Bangladesh Civil service. The name of the cadres are: Bangladesh Civil Service (administration, food, cooperative, general education, technical education, economics, trade, statistical, public works, public health, roads and highways, tele-communication, audit and accounts, customs and excise, taxation, foreign affairs, health, family planning, information, judicial, postal, police, ansar, railway: transportation and commercial, railway: engineering, agriculture, forest, livestock and fisheries). It should be noted that unified career service with 14 functional cadres and 14 sub-cadres were introduced on 1 September 1980<sup>[4]</sup>.

**Recruitment policy for class-I posts in Bangladesh:**

Recruitment and selection in the Bangladesh civil service have been and is significantly molded by the Constitution as well as governed by executive orders of the government from time to time [5]. A sound recruitment policy puts premium on merit rather than on any other consideration. The existing recruitment policies in Bangladesh are characterized by predominance of quota system based on the principle of representation and special consideration shown to specific groups of candidates. Bangladesh largely follows a closed entry system where class-I level officers are recruited directly at the entry level through open competitive examinations into twenty nine cadre services comprise general administration, functional and professional streams where personnel are recruited under the Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment Rules, 1982. The Public Service Commission (PSC) oversees recruitment on the basis of equality of opportunity as envisaged in the Constitution of Bangladesh [6]. Article 29 of the Constitution envisages that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment of office in the service of the republic and that no citizen shall on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office [7].

In Bangladesh merit and quota both are used in recruitment. But the principle of merit has been modified here. The ‘quota system’ of recruitment often violates the principle of merit. Immediately after liberation the ‘Interim Recruitment Policy’ was announced by the government in September 1972(The Government of Bangladesh, Establishment Division office memorandum No. Estt./RI/R-73/72-109(500), September 5 (1972). It was only in 1976 that recruitment rules for appointment of superior posts were framed. The major thrust of both the policy was to achieve more equitable representation of the people of all districts of Bangladesh in various services and posts. It required recruitment based on quota for districts on the basis of population. Quota for war affected women, freedom fighters and tribal were also introduced. In course of time it was changed for more than one occasion. In accordance with a government decisions of July 1985 further modification were made in the quota reservation system. Details of the quota system and the subsequent changes made are shown in the following Table.1.

If the required number of candidates is not available for filling up the posts reserved for women and freedom fighters, the vacancies left over are also distributed to districts and divisions on the basis of population [5].

Table 1:Categories of quota for class-I Service

Categories of Quota	For Class-I Service (%)		
	1972	1976	1985
Merit	20	40	45
Freedom fighters	30	30	
War affected women	10	10	
District quota	40	20	
Freedom fighters women		10	30
Tribal		5	
*Other General Candidates			10
Total	100	100	

\*Other general candidates: This 10% are distributed among the districts on the basis of population. Source: 1. Interim recruitment policy, 1972

2. Establishment division office memorandum No. ED/RI/R/56/75/52, April 8,1976:, Ministry of Establishment memo No. MER/R-1/S-13/84-149(250), July 28, 1985

Quota is a poor substitute for provisions of adequate facilities that can result in equality of opportunity and ability to all sections of the society [6]. It constitutes a major departure from the system of recruitment on the basis of merit as one of the recognized techniques of building up an efficient civil service. The system of recruitment on the basis of quota militates against efficiency in administration. It also affects adversely the incentive of the intending candidates [8]. Again district and other quotas fixed on the basis of place of birth are not consistent with the provisions of the Constitution. Nevertheless, the policy of discriminatory district quota on the basis of birth is still in vogue. This quota complicates recruitment in more ways than one besides denying meritorious civil servants from entering into the government services. It also happens that smaller divisions and districts are generally deprived of any post when recruitment is of a smaller number of posts, as it usually is. Large districts actually get the major share and the smaller districts in practice remain deprived. The irony of the situation is that geographic quota was introduced for restoring the balance in employment from all districts, but in practice, it is doing the opposite [6]. It is high time to review the existing quota system. For example we can think of the freedom fighter quota. It is now impossible to find a freedom fighter of thirty- two years. The seat reserved for freedom fighters is 30% but since 1986 maximum 4.4% of them succeeded in the BCS Examination. In 1990 it was 0% and in 1991 and 1992 it was 0.1% [9]. The PSC in it’s annual report of 1992 had held the view that except for the quota reservation for the tribal, there is need for review of quota system in other categories. The PSC is of the view that there is no ground for continuing with the quota reservation for the freedom fighters. The PSC, has, in fact, argued in favor of a revised quota system for recruitment to the public services. It has called

for reducing 30% quota for the freedom fighters to 5% and distributing remaining 25% as 10% for women and remaining 15% for merit. In addition, the PSC had called for a review of the district based quota system. Because it is seen that many candidates are deprived of selection although they qualify in the merit quota but from the districts they come do not have any quota or a very limited quota <sup>[10]</sup>.

In the year 1997, the government issued an official notification by which quota distribution has been reorganized [Establishment Division Memo No. Coordination (R-I)-S-8/95(Part-2)-56(500), March 17,1997.]. The unique feature of this order is that due to unavailability of qualified freedom fighters the 30% quota reserved for this category was reserved for the children of the freedom fighters and Shaeed freedom fighters. According to this order new quota arrangement for class-I services is as follows:

• Merit	45%
• District Quota (on the basis of population)	
• Freedom fighters/Children of freedom fighters	30%
• Women	10%
• Tribal	5%
• Rest (general candidates of the districts)	10%
Total	100%

Recently on the basis of a general meeting held in the PSC, dated 27 June 2002 a decision was taken that from the 21<sup>st</sup> BCS Examination if 30% eligible freedom fighters could not be available then the vacant posts of the quota should be filled up by merit. And accordingly in the 22nd BCS examination as the reserved 590 posts of freedom fighters were not possible to fill up due to shortage of eligible candidates, the remaining posts were filled up on the basis of merit <sup>[11]</sup>.

In its Annual Reports, PSC has been repeatedly recommending changes in the quota system in favor of merit principle. But the recommendation has not yet been acted upon. Time has come to go all out for recruitment purely on merit. Only a very limited percentage of recruitment may be made on quota for women and backward tribal sections of the people for a certain period. Meanwhile, opportunities should be extended to them for their advancement so that quota is altogether abolished in the future<sup>[6]</sup>.

**Recruitment rules:** There is no law made by the parliament for governing the appointment and conditions of service relating to the services of the country. Before the finalization of the recruitment rule, the responsibility to frame recruitment rules for the various services/posts primarily lies with the respective ministries/divisions but

subject to the approval and clearance from the Establishment Division, Ministry of Law and the PSC. According to the Rules of Business, 1975 all individual recruitment rules are required to be finally submitted to the President for approval.

Until the introduction of a new service structure in September 1980, the recruitment of government servants in Bangladesh was not based on any firm principle and systematic procedure<sup>[4]</sup>. According to the Article 133 of the Constitution finally the Recruitment Rules were framed in January 1981. Among others it mainly dealt with the procedure for recruitment. In 1982, elaborate Recruitment Rules were framed for appointment to various cadres of Bangladesh civil service. There are two methods of recruitment such as (a) direct recruitment (b) indirect recruitment. Direct recruitment is for the fresh entrance through competitive tests, examinations and interviews conducted by BPSC. Indirect recruitment can be by promotion, transfer or deputation.

**Recruiting agency:** In Bangladesh rules, regulations and instructions concerning recruitment and selection emanate from the establishment Ministry. But the task of recruitment is entrusted to the PSC, which is a constitutional body with defined powers and functions guided and sometimes controlled by the Establishment Ministry<sup>[5]</sup>. The existing PSC was established on December 22, 1977 in place of BPSC (First) BPSC (Second) constituted in May 1972. According to the BPSC Ordinance 1977 it consists of a chairman and members between six (minimum) and fifteen (maximum), including the chairman. PSC now consists of a chairman and eleven other members. With time the workload of the PSC has increased and the numbers of officers and staff of PSC has become increasingly inadequate<sup>[11]</sup>. But as an independent body it is the constitutional duty of Bangladesh Public Service Commission to conduct competitive examinations for recruitment to the cadre posts.

PSC's position as an independent constitutional body seems to have circumscribed by the fact that it is an attached department of the Establishment Ministry. Most matters of its organization, administration and finance are subject to the final scrutiny and control of the Establishment Ministry. So it can't work independently as hoped<sup>[12]</sup>.

**Recruitment to the Bangladesh cadre services through open competitive examination (BCS Examination):** After independence two special examinations were held for freedom fighters and non-freedom fighters in 1972 and

Table 2: Variations in recruitment procedure

Year	Type of examination	Total Marks	Method	Number recruited	Time taken
1972	Special examination for freedom fighters		Oral	353	1 year
1973	Special examination for non-freedom fighters	100	Written on condense syllabus	1314	1 year
1977	Regular examination for superior posts	1600	Written/viva/psychological/medical	129	About 3 years
1979	Regular examination for superior posts	1600	Written/viva/psychological/Medical	130	2 years
1982	Regular examination for superior posts	1600	Written/viva/ psychological/medical	765	1 year
1983	Two special examinations	300	Viva/written	727	1 year
1984	Regular examination	900	Written/viva/Psychological/medical	N/a	

Source: Morshed, M.M.Rahman(1997). Bureaucratic Response to Administrative Decentralization, P: 88

1973 to join the civil service. Then in 1977 and 1979 Regular Examination for Superior Posts were conducted (Table. 2).

In 1982 twenty-nine cadre services were formed in the civil service and accordingly in 1982, 1983 and 1984 examinations were held. In 1985 a new method of examination was introduced which is running till now<sup>[13]</sup>.

Selection of candidates to the various cadre services is now made through an open competitive examination i.e. the BCS examination.

The BCS examination conducted by the PSC is based on four tests:

- Written test
- Viva-voce examination
- Psychological examination
- Medical examination

**The qualification for appearing in the bcs examination:**

- Age limit: Freedom fighter and BCS (health) cadre: 21-32 years, Other cadres: 21-30 years and BCS (general education) cadre (only for tribal) 21-32 years
- He/she must be a graduate.
- He/she must be a citizen of Bangladesh<sup>[14]</sup>.

**Structure of the examination:** Before sitting in the written examination a candidate have to attend and secure a certain number in the preliminary examination of 100 marks which is known as the screening process to select a certain number of candidates for the written examination.

The structure of the competitive examination in Bangladesh is modeled on the Pakistan, in fact the British pattern. It consists of two parts- written and oral. The running syllabus and marks distribution in the competitive examination has been introduced in 1985. Total marks of the examination are 1000 of which the written part carries 800 and the viva-voce 200 marks. The written part consists of two sections: compulsory and optional. 500

Table 3: The marks distribution for BCS (general) cadres and BCS (technical/professional) cadres

For general cadres	Marks for technical cadres	Marks	Marks
Compulsory subjects: 5 (Bangla, English, Mathematics, everyday Science, Bangladesh affairs, International Affairs)	500	Compulsory subjects: 5 (Bangla, English, Mathematics, Everyday Science, Bangladesh Affairs, International Affairs)	500
Optional Subjects: 3 (From 64 subjects)	300	Academic Attainment	300
Viva-voce	200	Viva-voce	200
Total	1000	Total	1000

Source: PSC (2003). Annual Report, P: 16.

marks are allocated for compulsory subjects i.e. Bangla, English, Mathematics, General Knowledge (Bangladesh Affairs) and General Knowledge (International Affairs) and 300 for three optional papers as chosen by the candidates<sup>[13]</sup>. (Table 3).

Time allowed for each subject is 3 h. Within this time period the candidates have to answer essay, amplification of ideas, substance/ precis writing, correction of errors in composition, fill in the blanks, use of idioms and phrases, multiple choice and short answer question on language and literature in Bangla and English section. The object of the essay writing is to test a candidate’s ability to think constructively, to reason and to present his ideas logically and effectively in clear. Other questions are designed to test the candidate’s knowledge of the language and his/her capacity for its skillful use. The Bangladesh Affairs paper is designed to test a candidate’s knowledge on geographical, historical, social, cultural, political, economic and administrative affairs of Bangladesh. The International Affairs paper is intended to test the candidate’s knowledge of the international relations and cultural, geographical, political and economic problems of the world. In the Mathematics and Everyday Science paper the candidate’s knowledge in arithmetic, algebra and geometry and power of observation relating to matters of everyday science is tested (PSC, 1994:1-3) There are 64 optional paper of diverse nature and is arranged into four main groups. The

candidates have to select three papers but not more than two from any group<sup>[13]</sup>.

To qualify for the viva voce test a candidate must have to secure an aggregate of at least 45% marks in the written examination. He/ she must achieve at least 25% marks in each compulsory subject. Those who have passed the written examination then face a psychological test of 100 marks and a viva-voce of 200 marks. Pass mark in the viva-voce is 40%<sup>[14]</sup>. The object of the viva-voce is to test a candidate's self-possession, firmness of purpose, alertness, intelligence and intellectual outlook, personality, his personal qualities of mind and mental equipment, his moral and ethical qualities and vigor and strength of character. The candidates would be required a psychological test designed to assess their inherent tendencies and capabilities, their personal qualities and traits of character with special regard to their aptitude for the different services<sup>[11]</sup>. The preliminary test, written test and psychological written test is held in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and London centers. Viva-voce test is conducted in Dhaka and in some special incidences in London for those living abroad<sup>[14]</sup>.

The viva board consists of four members: the chairman of the PSC or any other member of the organization, a senior civil servant having the status of joint secretary, an academician and a psychologist. A candidate's position is determined by the aggregate of marks secured in the written and oral test.

The PSC get the qualified candidates examined medically by a medical board before final selection. A male candidates to be selected medically must be at least of five feet height and forty-five kg weight. Where as for a female candidate it is four feet ten inches height and forty kg weight at least<sup>[14]</sup>.

PSC then sends its recommendations to the Ministry of Establishment, which arranges verification and antecedents of the candidates with help of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Receiving satisfactory police report, the Establishment Ministry issues offers of appointment to candidates having approved by the President. On receipt of acceptance from the candidates, formal notification of appointment is issued. The candidates are placed on probation usually for a period of two years in different cadres on the basis of their merit list prepared, based on merit, quota and their own option. During this two years probationary period they have to undergo foundation training including training of departmental nature. Depending on his/her attainment of the prescribed standards as a result of his/her training, the office on probation is finally appointed on a regular basis to the

service concerned on successfully completing the prescribed probationary period<sup>[15]</sup>.

**Critical assessment :** Though it has been a policy of every government of the country to streamline the civil service system but the government has failed to build up a sound recruitment system in the civil service. There is no regular recruitment procedure followed by the ministries/ divisions and for that matter by the PSC. No unified recruitment rule has been framed by the government, which can be followed by the PSC. As a result it has become impossible to maintain standards of the candidates. For example, there are certain batches of recruits who were selected for the service only on the basis of an oral test. On the other hand, there are some batches that had to face a 2200-mark examination. In 1973 the first batch of Bangladesh civil service was recruited just on the basis of viva-voce conducted by the PSC. Against the advertised 300 class-I vacant posts more than two thousand people were recruited generally on political grounds. The most strange part of this recruitment was that there were not even intelligence or psychological test and that the vast multitude of class-I officers were from very contrasting academic background, from first class university post graduates (though a few only) to ordinary third division holding college graduates<sup>[15]</sup>. But it is a matter of discontent among members of the cadre services that despite the major disparity in the recruitment all members are getting equal facility in fixing the seniority, which they termed as quite unfair<sup>[5]</sup>. The main problem of recruitment in simple term is how to unite equality of opportunity with efficiency. Fifty five percent posts are reserved for various categories. Any scheme of reservation of posts is not favorable to administrative efficiency, although it gives satisfaction to backward classes.

The PSC is often blamed for delay in the finalization of the selection of candidates by interviews. The PSC also faces criticisms that advertisement for different posts is not drafted in a precise, effective and attractive ways<sup>[5]</sup>. The existing procedure of BCS Examination conducted by the PSC, whose credibility has now become a question to the nation, is now considered backdated, questionable, confusing and time consuming. The whole thing has recently been politicized, with no ray of hope left for the students cherishing for a long time to join the BCS. The flawed process of the examination is shattering dreams of many deserving candidates. Since 1972, no government or the PSC itself made any serious attempt to reform the system. The so-called preliminary test, old-fashioned written test and viva-voce carrying 200 marks, encourage

the evildoers to manipulate the process and make it to the final merit list. The system cannot be a good indicator to evaluate the candidates' merit or aptitude. The quota system is another stumbling block for the meritorious students. This is the right time to rethink on the issue and make necessary changes so as to keep the selection procedure above question and confusion.

Like the preliminary test, the second phase, that is, the written test is also not above controversy. This test carries 800 marks, of which 500 is allocated for compulsory subjects and 300 for optional papers. These 300 optional marks have room for making discrimination among the candidates from various backgrounds. For example, candidates having a background of any subject belonging to the arts or social science faculty are a victim of this discrimination. If he/she is a student of English or International Relations or Sociology, he/she is likely to choose three optional qualitative subjects from psychology, history, social-welfare, political science and so on of social science or arts group. Needless to say, it is very unlikely for students of arts and social science background to take optional subjects like mathematics, statistics, soil science and so on which help candidates carry 70-90% marks. And these quantitative subjects are the trodden fields for the science graduates. On the other hand, it has been proved that it is very tough for the candidates of arts or social science background, having some qualitative subjects, to secure more than 65% marks on an average even he/she can secure the highest marks in the examination<sup>[16]</sup>.

Viva-voce, the third phase of the selection procedure, is another obstacle to making the recruitment process fair. As it carries 200 marks, it can give an opportunity to some dishonest politicians, PSC members, or some powerful persons holding a high social stratum to resort to nepotism to manipulate the entire process prior to making the final merit list for recruitment<sup>[16]</sup>.

At present a huge number of candidates are appearing for competitive examinations. Such a large number of examinees necessitate a large number of examiners. Apart from the question of quality of examiners, this creates inevitable variation in grading. Besides, a number of viva-voce boards interview candidates. That leaves ample scope for variation in the results. Objectivity in assessing the merit and suitability of candidates suffer not necessarily because of personal bias but also because of attitudinal differences and variations in standards of tests.

Finally we can point out the educational institutions, which lack vitality. For decades the educational system

has been under attack and criticism but though it has few defenders, it has somehow resisted the change. The standard of education at now is at very low ebb and so the quality of students except few. As a result the civil service suffers in shortage of meritorious personnel.

## CONCLUSIONS

PSC in its annual report, 1998 suggested some changes in the Bangladesh civil service recruitment (age, qualification and examination for direct recruitment) rules, 1982 and placed a few recommendations with regard to reforming the examination process of BCS class-I posts. The basic changes include exclusion of optional subjects, separate psychological test which was held for the first time on 11 June, 2004, elimination of candidates by stricter educational qualifications, raising average pass marks to 50% in place of existing 45% and the stipulation of minimum 30% marks instead of 25% computing the grand total. Examination on a total of 1000 marks has been proposed to be redistributed for BCS (general) and BCS (technical/ professional) cadres<sup>[13]</sup>. PSC also proposed to follow the same syllabus for general and professional cadres and abolish the optional papers<sup>[17]</sup>. But this is under consideration and there is no guarantee of implementing them.

Here we would like to recommend the following format for the BCS Examination that the PSC can consider.

- The conventional preliminary test and the time consuming written test should be cancelled. Instead, only one examination consisting of the general subjects like language and communication (Bangla and English), General Knowledge (Bangladesh Affairs and International Affairs) and Mathematics can be held. Analytical ability and writing skill tests could be included in it so that, candidates from all backgrounds get the same confidence to sit for the examination.
- Marks have to be reduced for the viva voce to avoid nepotism and any sort of manipulation.
- The existing quota system should be abolished completely.
- The conduct of the examination system should be deemed fair and achieve a high level of public acceptance. The examination should ensure that no particular candidate or group has an unfair advantage over others.
- The examination authority should deliver the required services making the best possible use of physical, financial and human resources. The examination

should be administered according to agreed schedules and in particular, results should be issued on time.

- Finally, high level of honesty on the part of the examination agency staff is required.

Along with this the government have to ensure that the PSC can perform its functions without any interference.

Considering the above facts it is beyond doubt that recruitment procedures need considerable improvement and streamlining. But in the present context of Bangladesh, no system of recruitment can fundamentally change the character of the civil service because standards of education have deteriorated at all levels and as well as values have sharply declined.

The society and the country altogether show preferences on quantity rather than quality of education. It is time to change this attitude. The Education Commission should be fully aware of this state of affairs and would suggest remedial measures. Along with this the government should conduct annually a manpower survey to ensure that the meritorious and talented students joining the civil service and using for nation building.

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