

A strange way to hire teachers!

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A recent directive related to the recruitment of faculty members at public universities had a chilling effect on the universities. Several media reported that the University Grants Commission (UGC) would request the universities to take written tests for hiring faculty members and ask for a police report to testify that the person was not involved in any anti-government activities. These recommendations came from the Ministry of Education because of "malpractices" in faculty recruitments at different universities. Should the public universities adhere to such advice?

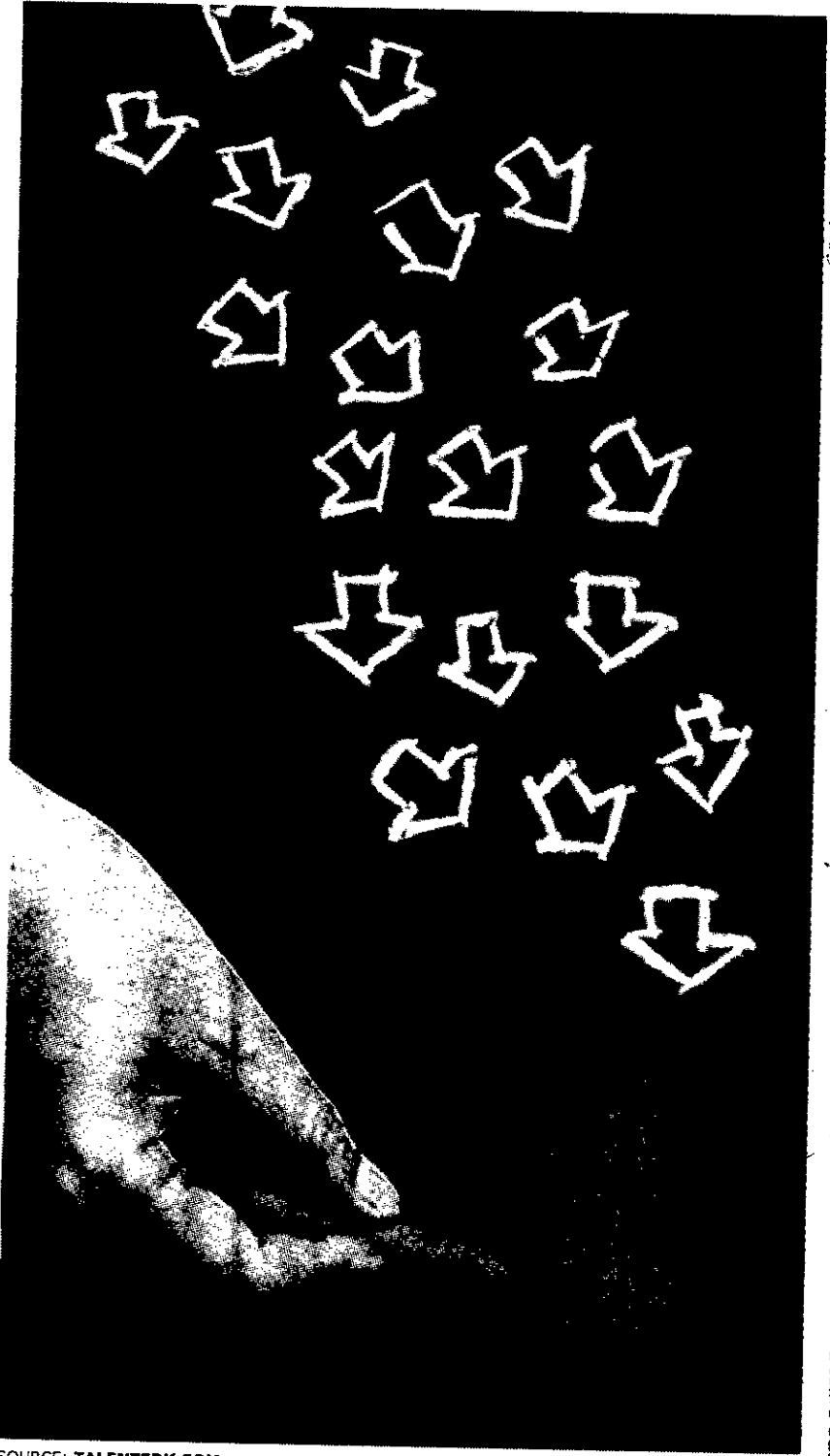
Let us explore the faculty recruitment process in the country and elsewhere. More or less all public universities follow an elaborate recruitment process similar to that of the University of Dhaka. When there is a vacant position at any department, the position is advertised in daily newspapers and the university website to seek applications for employment from qualified candidates. The Department drafts the advertisement based on its need. In addition to the University's basic requirements for a position, a department can have additional requirements. Usually high CGPAs in all terminal examinations are required for an entry position like lecturer while other conditions need to be fulfilled for higher positions. A board of five or more people including subject experts interviews the candidates to see whether they will be able to teach students. Based on interview performance, the board selects the qualified candidate and places him/her before the Syndicate. The Syndicate appoints him/her to the respective department.

North American and European universities also carry out a similar but a more rigorous process for recruiting faculty members. In many North American universities, faculty hiring committees include graduate student representatives alongside faculty members. At the beginning of the recruitment process, the vacant positions are advertised on several online job sites including the university

website. Around three candidates are short listed for filling the position. Each short listed candidate is invited for a day. A candidate begins the day with a public presentation on a topic from his/her area of specialisation where faculty members and graduate students ask critical questions. After the presentation, the candidate meets the graduate students and

written tests for hiring faculty members. In Bangladesh, the UGC is pondering to propose written tests. When candidates with high CGPAs can only apply for a university teaching job, why do we need to go for a written test? Didn't the candidates already demonstrate their academic feats by securing high grades? Shouldn't our concern be to test whether they

academic results in student life constitute only one requirement while other prerequisites include teaching ability, approach, likeability and collegiality. Sometimes candidates with high CGPAs are left out because of their poor scores on other areas. However, it cannot be denied that sometimes universities recruit and leave out



SOURCE: TALENTEDK.COM

faculty members of the recruiting Department separately to demonstrate what he/she would contribute to the Department. The day ends with a dinner and with the hiring committee members. Recruitment decisions are made by the hiring committee based on the candidates' seminar performance, likability and collegiality.

No university in the modern world takes would make good teachers? Candidates having the ability to express their ideas candidly and explain things lucidly have the potential to make good teachers.

We see media reports claiming malpractices in the hiring process when a candidate with the highest CGPAs is excluded but a candidate with relatively lower CGPAs is recruited. In the selection process, candidates based on non-academic considerations. When malpractice can happen in faculty recruitment, usually it occurs because of pressure from people who have power and influence. During a selection process, candidates try to lobby with influential persons to manipulate the selection process in their favour. In some cases, the selection committees succumb to

the pressure. But these instances are rare at the University of Dhaka. However, if there is any allegation of malpractices in recruitment at any university, the UGC must investigate it and take necessary measures. Written tests will not be able to stop malpractices in recruitment. If the recruitment committee is not committed to maintaining fairness, the committee members will leak out questions to make their preferred candidates stand on top of the list.

The issue of police verification for university teachers for anti-government activities suggests that those who came up with this instruction are not knowledgeable about the stature and role of universities. Perhaps, they are thinking about applying the recruitment procedure of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) for hiring university teachers.

Universities are places where students learn to raise questions about the existing knowledge and the system. Students and faculty members are supposed to think beyond the box and experiment with new ideas. Plurality in terms of opinions and viewpoints should be a cherished ideal at the higher seats of learning. Not only university teachers but also every citizen has the right to criticize the government and hold divergent viewpoints in a democracy. I am afraid that police verification for university teachers for anti-government activities may work as a weapon to control dissent and debate, leading us toward an authoritarian society. Police verification of background should only be necessary for people who will deal with state secrets not individuals who will impart knowledge to young minds.

Nowhere in the modern world do governments meddle in university recruitment process because such actions would contravene university autonomy and academic freedom. Nevertheless, the recruitment process needs to be made more rigorous at public universities, arranging public lectures/seminars for candidates and counting this performance in making recruitment decisions.

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