

Quota system in govt jobs: Reforms must be well thought out

Experts say 2018 quota abolishment done hurriedly



Photo: Prabir Das/Star

Any disproportionate quota system usually hurts a merit-based civil service, and any kind of decision to reform the system, in place since independence, should be well thought out, experts say.

The quota-based system should not dominate the public administration at the expense of merit as the nation needs the right people in the right place, they add.



[For all latest news, follow The Daily Star's Google News channel.](#)

But, according to them, the government decision to hurriedly abolish the quota system in Class 1 and Class 2 jobs in 2018 following a student protest was not well thought out. In the current context, the existing quota system should be thoroughly reviewed and evaluated to avoid new complications.

“It is inappropriate that there will be an abnormal quota for a certain group. On the other hand, there is no scope for abolishing all kinds of quota in public service as the constitution favours the quota system.”

— Firoz Mia Former bureaucrat

"You need to keep the quota system for certain groups of people. But it needs to be evaluated from time to time. This is not happening in Bangladesh," Firoz Mia, who retired as an additional secretary of public administration ministry, told The Daily Star.

"It is inappropriate that there will be an abnormal quota for a certain group. On the other hand, there is no scope for abolishing all kinds of quota in public service as the constitution favours the quota system," said Firoz, who also authored several books on public administration.

[Read more](#)

History of the quota system in Bangladesh



"The way the government abolished the quota system for government officials from Grade 1 to Grade 13 [in 2018] was not appropriate at all. Almost every country in the world has a quota system in government jobs for disadvantaged groups."

“After so many years of independence, it is not reasonable to keep quota of freedom fighters.”

— Ahmedul Huq Choudhury Former PSC chairman

In Bangladesh, the quota system was introduced through an executive order in 1972 and was amended several times. From 1972 to 1976, 20 percent of the government officials were recruited based on merit, and the rest was quota-based. Merit-based recruitment was increased to 40 percent in 1976 which continued until 1985, when it was increased to 45 percent.

In 2012, one percent quota was introduced for persons with disability, reducing the merit-based recruitment to 44 percent.

In 2018, the government issued a circular abolishing the quota system for Class 1 and Class 2 jobs, in the wake of a massive protest by students, who wanted a reform and not an abolition.

Until then, 56 percent of government jobs had been reserved for candidates from various quotas. Of this, 30 percent were for freedom fighters' families, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people from underdeveloped districts, 5 percent for members of indigenous communities, and 1 percent for persons with disabilities.

In 1996, as the numbers of those claiming freedom fighters' quota positions started to dwindle, the government extended the quota to children of freedom fighters. In 2009, it was further expanded to include the grandchildren of freedom fighters.

The ongoing quota reform movement began after the High Court on June 5, 2024, ruled that the 2018 government circular abolishing the quota system was illegal, effectively reinstating the quota system. The government appealed the decision, and the Appellate Division has issued a status quo on the HC order.

After the HC order, students took to the streets again, waging large-scale protests across the country, demanding a reform of the quota system.

TIMELINE

JULY 7, 2024

Protesters launch "Bangla Blockade"

JULY 9, 2024

Two DU students file petition seeking stay order on HC verdict

JULY 10, 2024

SC orders status quo on the issue for four weeks

"I cannot say why the government took such a decision [to abolish the quota system], because almost every country has a quota system. It was not a well-thought-out decision," AT Ahmedul Huq Choudhury, a former PSC chairman, told this newspaper.

India has a quota system for public service and they call it "reservations system," under which 15 percent of the government jobs are reserved for Scheduled Castes, 7.5 percent for Scheduled Tribes and 27 percent for Other Backward Classes, and 10 percent for Economically Weaker Sections.

Nepal reserves 45 percent civil service seats for women, along with indigenous community, Madhesi, Dalit, persons with disability and people from underdeveloped areas.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka also have reserved positions in government jobs for women, ethnic minorities, and individuals from different regions.

The government should decide on the percentage of the quota upon analysis of the data, but women, ethnic minority groups and persons with disability should be included in the quota system, said Ahmedul Huq.

"After so many years of independence, it is not reasonable to keep quota of freedom fighters. But if the government feels it necessary, there may be a small quota for the freedom fighters but it should be only for the freedom fighters' families that are in a bad condition," he said.

Public administration researcher and former secretary AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder is in favour of abolishing the quota system, except for persons with disability.

"However, the government can have a detailed evaluation before taking a decision in this regard so that it can place its argument to support the decision," he told The Daily Star.

Supreme Court lawyer and constitutional expert Arif Khan said the government can restore reasonable quotas for women, persons with disability, ethnic groups and freedom fighters any time if it wants.

"But now that the matter is before court, the solution will come in line with the instructions given by the court. However, there is no legal obstacles for the government to make a decision from time to time on the issue because the government has to take decisions at different times to carry out executive activities," he told this newspaper.

Talking about the students' demand for quota system reform, Public Administration Minister Farhad Hossain said, "If the matter was solely in the hands of the government, we could have considered their demand.

"As it is now a matter pending before the court, steps will have to be taken as per the instructions of the court and we are waiting for that."