

How to stop corruption in recruitment of university teachers

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TRANSPARENCY International Bangladesh (TIB) in its report revealed allegations of

unauthorised financial transactions in eight public universities and political patronage, nepotism, regionalism and religious identity as dominant drivers of corruption in the recruitment process at 13 public universities. In reaction, major stakeholders including the University of Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh and the Federation of Bangladesh University Teacher's Association in their public statement have termed the report as biased, baseless, conspiratorial, imaginary and self-contradictory, etc. In fact, similar reactions on TIB's report were noticed in the past, but refusal of corruption allegations is not a sensible response, rather, it is a strategy of neglecting the problem. These practices often dishearten the messenger and inspire wrongdoers to continue their corrupt practices.

As human beings, we cannot expect 'zero corruption' or 'no corruption' in personal, private or public spheres. Incidence of corruption is a crux reality. The key concern is whether corruption is predominant or hinders public interest and wellbeing or not. Prevalence of corruption also matters by context or culture. If we look at the legal, institutional and operational framework of public institutions like public universities, we could easily observe that there are certain red-flags, i.e., integrity concerns, those create ground for corruption in the recruitment of lecturers in public universities. The

red-flags in recruitment of teachers are deep-rooted.

Unchecked autonomy

Public universities in Bangladesh are autonomous. There is no regulatory entity to regulate or oversee their operations. Universities decide and revise recruitment rules with approval from the syndicates as they desire. The Ministry of Education (MoED) and UGC also have enforcing authority even in case of proven allegation of corruption against the high officials of public universities. The MoED requests UGC for inquiry into the allegations and UGC follows accordingly, and finally, MoED recommends the government to take actions. Public universities are run by public money, but in reality, these are not under the vigilance of any entity. This unchecked autonomy has created frontiers of opportunities to misuse public money through recruiting hundreds of excess teachers over the years.

Dubious recruitment process of Vice Chancellor (VC)

There is no transparent and credible procedure for appointment of VC in public universities. There is fierce competition for this position. The appointment of VC is not based on professional excellence, personal competency and credibility, rather on political association and loyalty. Political appointment is not a predicament, but this becomes problematic when substandard partisan teachers get appointments, and later damage the image of the government as they abuse their position for personal gain. A section of teachers even with

out any administrative experience or good track record become VCs by using their strong connections with influential political leaders belonging to the ruling party and policy makers. After holding the position, a VC has to compensate by fulfilling the requests of these people. This reflects in the recruitment of teachers along partisan lines, ignoring merit of the candidates. In recent years, there have been allegations of incompetence and corruption against a few VCs which were also looked into by UGC investigations. Therefore, the absence of a credible appointment procedure of

of pro-ruling partisans as its members. Accordingly, VCs do not have to face challenges from the syndicate to approve any decision. No example has yet been found regarding the rejection of a recommendation given by a recruitment committee headed by a VC in recent times. There is a good example of recruiting teachers fairly and credibly and continuing these by overlooking political pressure and threat from public representatives. Therefore, the honesty and positive will of VC is an essential prerequisite for credible recruitment of teachers.

Finally, there is no generic or taken-for-granted way for fighting corruption. Context specific controlling and corrective measures could be undertaken followed by multiple and comprehensive actions.

VC in the public universities has created grounds for endangering the recruitment of teachers based on merit.

Unlimited and unchecked discretions of VCs

A VC (in some universities the Pro-VC), the head of the recruitment boards/ selection committee and the syndicate of the university, could be considered as the nucleus of teacher recruitment process. In reality, a VC decides, determines and administers the whole recruitment. There is scope to form syndicates with the majority

of applicants as it desires. These documents could be amended even if a VC desires to recruit a specific candidate(s) by using pro-ruling party dominant syndicates at universities. This gap also has created grounds for abusing the position of VC, syndicate and people involved in recruiting teachers on political ideology, kinship, regionalism, religion and ethnic identity and unauthorised financial transaction.

No regulatory power of UGC

The UGC is expected to be the guardian and authority of public universities, but in reality, it is a 'toothless' tiger. UGC has no control over the recruitment activities of teachers in public universities. Furthermore, because of the absence of a transparent procedure for appointing the UGC Chairman and its members, it is often used as a 'dumping ground' for the tact supporters of the ruling party.

Utility dominant over risk of loss

A section of VCs and university teachers involved in corrupt teacher recruitment practices know that there is little chance of being caught or penalised. There is also the example of a VC with allegations of corruption against him being given an opportunity to complete his tenure. Two UGC investigation committees and concerned ministry advised the government to take punitive measure against him, but no measure was ever taken. This incident gives a clear message that persons involved in recruitment and related corrupt practices has rare

chance of facing departmental prosecution or penalty. In the absence of effective mechanisms to punish corrupt actors, a section of VC and teachers involved in teacher recruitment do not dare to manipulate recruitment process in favour of their preferred candidates. Therefore, the prevalence of opportunity in gaining benefits through corrupt behaviour is a dominant red-flag. This could be termed as the foremost cause for corruption in the recruitment process.

Finally, there is no generic or taken-for-granted way for fighting corruption. Context specific controlling and corrective measures could be undertaken followed by multiple and comprehensive actions. The foremost concern is the 'tone of top', especially when it comes to controlling corruption at permissible level both in public and private institutions. Partisan appointment in public institution is not a big concern, but problems arise when wrong people are being appointed. I have confidence that the present government will take effective measures to address the integrity concerns, adopt a comprehensive set of policies or guidelines on recruitment of teachers, and bring universities under effective oversight and accountability, and thereby, create an environment for recruiting the best candidates as teachers in public universities.

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