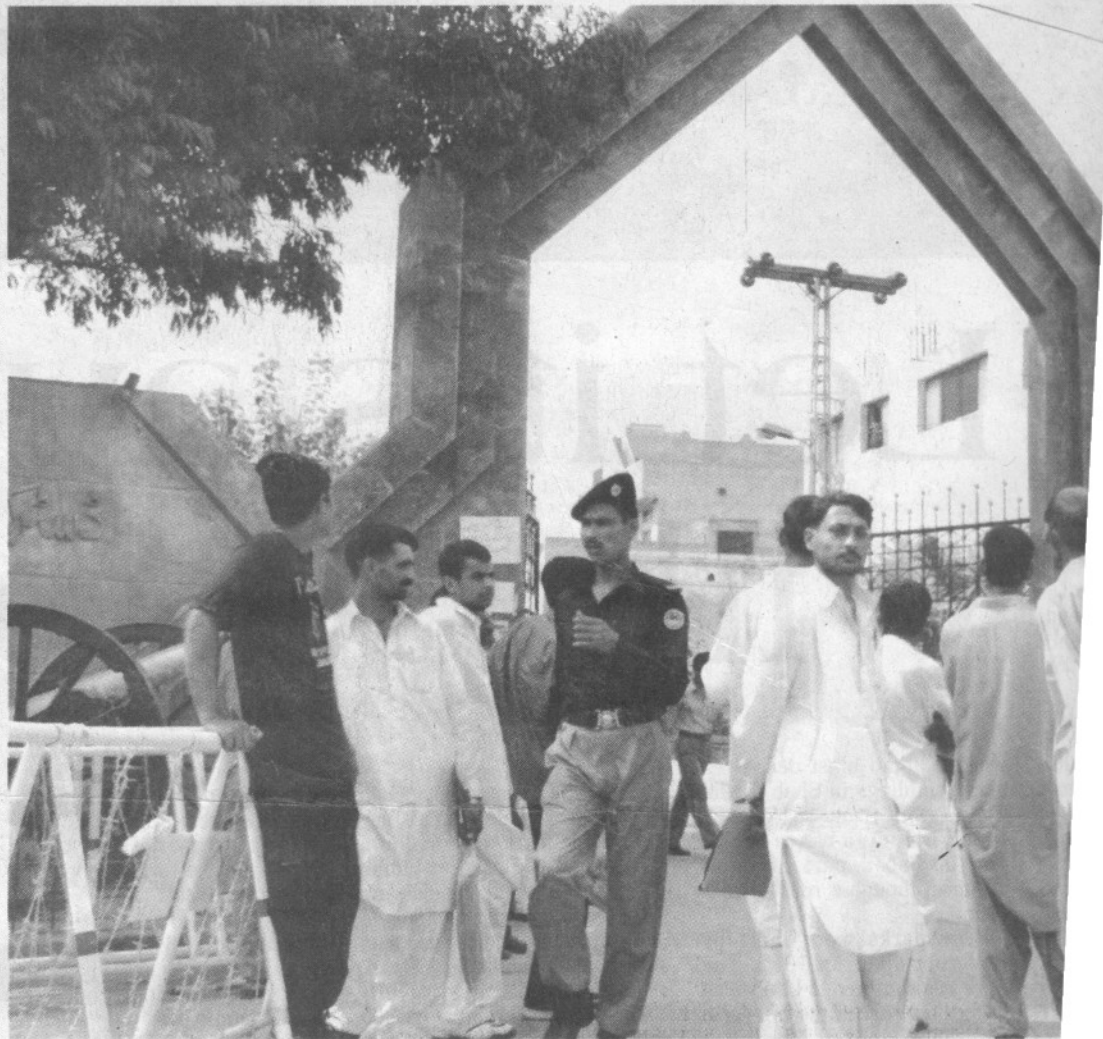


Thousands of candidates have applied for the posts of constables. But the perception that one can only get the job through unfair means is discouraging many of them

Wanted: — Social Police const



Prospective constables.

The Punjab police announced 529 vacancies for the post of constables a couple of weeks back. Understandably, it drew an immediate response from the thousands of matriculates living all over Punjab. Since then there is a lot of activity in and around the Police Lines, Lahore: an arduous process

police officials vehemently deny. There are a host of issues that complicate the process of selection — from the stage where the officials assess the physical condition of the candidates, to the issue of domicile, to the written test.

Monday, September 1. Muhammad Bashir, a candidate for the job of police constable, is standing under the shade of a tree beside the Police Lines, Lahore. Tension can be read on his face as he is waiting to be called in for a re-measurement going to start soon. One of the more than 250 candidates who have been

says.

The few hundred candidates had earlier made a request to the Superintendent of Police headquarters, Lahore Tasadduq Hussain that their measurements be taken again as they were not satisfied with the measurements previously taken by the DSPs and the junior staff.

"There is a method to how they come up with these inaccurate measurements," a candidate standing in front of the SP Office, whispers to me. "They want to reject as many candidates as possible at the measurement stage to remove competition for the candidates 'of their own choice'."

By Ather Naqvi

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ands of candidates applied for the post. Photo: Rahat Dar

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one?" questions Riaz Mahmood, whose son has applied for the job. "Neither those who bribe the officials nor the officials disclose what they have been up to. So there is no proof against them to challenge them."

The controversy does not end here. A lot many candidates complain that many of the applicants have fake domiciles. "Candidates from cities and districts of Punjab other than Lahore obtain the domicile of

involving the measurement of the candidates — race, written test and interviews.

More than 14,000 application forms were issued and thousands applied for the mere 529 seats of constables, many of them graduates and a few even holding masters' degree in arts and science subjects.

Aspersions were cast over the recruitment process, which the

measurement going to start soon. One of the more than 250 candidates who have been recalled for the measurement of their height and chest, Bashir's future hopes hinge on the accurate measurements that can get him through the process.

"The standard measurement for chest is 33 inches. I think my chest measures 34 inches but the staff in there measured my chest as 32 and a half inches which I think is not correct," he

measurement stage to remove competition for the candidates 'of their own choice'."

Then there is also another side of the story. "They give wrong measurements *sahab jee*," says a head constable assisting with the measurement exercise at the office. "When we are taking measurements, they inflate their chests in an effort to come up to the required standards. This is the reason the SP is present here to watch over it,"

tion'. "The more influential ones have access to the higher authorities. Money and influence are what you need to be a constable here," he says.

"If there is so much corruption involved at the time of recruitment, can we expect a corruption-free police force?" says Zeeshan Bhatti, a candidate. "Those who get the job by paying bribes have to make up what they have spent before getting the job."

But there is no sound evidence to support that the candidates bribe the officials to secure a police job. "There be

...cts of Punjab other than Lahore obtain the domicile of Lahore and apply here. This is not fair. We Lahorites have suffered a lot because of this," says Obaid Ullah, a candidate. "There must be some rules and regulations to stop this."

This logic does not impress Haji Nabi Bakhsh who has come all the way from Okara to see one of his sons apply for the job. "We are residents of Lahore though our ancestral home is in Okara. How can anyone challenge our candidature? We got domicile from the government," he declares.

The senior officials of the

police department do not find an iota of truth in the perceptions of the people. "This is all nonsense," says a high ranking official of the Police Lines on the condition of anonymity. "We are taking measurements of the candidates for the second time just to ensure transparency," he says. "Conducting tests and interviews of such a large number of candidates is quite a task. And we are trying to make it as transparent as we can. As regards the domicile issue it's the district government's responsibility. So if someone has a Lahore domicile, we

cannot challenge it."

"The law says that if a person proves that he has been a resident of Lahore for one year or more he or she is eligible to be issued the domicile," says Khalid Sultan, District Coordination Officer (DCO), Lahore. "So there should be no ambiguity about that," he maintains.

While there is tough competition among the candidates, the likes of Muhammad Bashir, who think that they require something more than just the stated talents in the application forms, can only hope for the best.