## POINT \*\*COUNTERPOINT

### Bangladesh's MDG report card

TANVIRUL ISLAM DIPU

ANGLADESH has the largest number of poor people in the world after China and India. About 49.6 percent people cannot earn even one dollar a day. This huge number of people is deprived of food and shelter, as well as other basic human needs like education, health, safe drinking water, etc.

The main objective of MDGs is the alleviation of poverty by the year 2015. The agreed goals to be attained by the year 2015 are 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) achieve universal primary education, 3) promote gender equality and empower women, 4) reduce child mortality, 5) improve maternal health, 6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, 7) ensure environmental sustainability, and finally 8) develop a global partnership for development.

Let us examine the present Bangladesh situation to see where we are in relation to achieving the

#### MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Bangladesh government has fixed the target to reduce proportion of people below \$1 per day (PPP) from 58.8 percent in 1991 to 29.4 percent by 2015 and to reduce proportion of people in extreme poverty from 28 percent in 1991 to 14 percent. First of all, it is a big question whether one dollar is a good indicator of poverty in our country, and secondly, the number of poor or very poor people which the government identified differs with other research organizations.

Bangladesh is not on the way to achieve the first target of MDGs. The Daily Star on May 15, 2005 showed a grim picture of the changing poverty situation

**DR MOAZZEM HOSSAIN** 

especially in the rural area. In the rural area household income of poor dropped (by 7.32 percent) and per capita income rose only 0.54 percent over the past six years.

According to the People's Progress Report on MDG (PPRM), 67.5 percent were identified as poor through their selfassessment and definition as against the 53 percent as estimated in the BBS/HIES 2000 survey. More than one third of the rural population (36.3 percent) was identified as very poor and 54 percent as poor.

The economists and social researchers vary their opinion on the base mark of poverty indicator of earning one dollar (approximately Tk 65) per day. It is not possible according to the present context of Bangladesh to purchase day to day needs for a family of average 5.5 members with this amount. On the other hand, the government has agreed to halve the proportion of people in poverty (as per national poverty line) by 2010 and ensure an absolute reduction in the number of poor people within the same

According to one report, Bangladesh will require 135 years to eliminate poverty in rural areas and 43 years to achieve the prime target of the MDGs at the current rate of poverty reduction.

The poverty monitoring survey 2004 by BBS shows that the poverty rate declined 2.6 percent in the last five years, which amounted to an annual poverty reduction rate of about 0.52 percent. The Citizen's Global Progress Report on Poverty Eradication and Gender Equity ranked Bangladesh as the fifth worst among 125 countries in attaining the MDGs. It placed Bangladesh above only Ethiopia, Rwanda, Niger, and Madagascar.

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education

The second target of MDGs is to ensure full course of primary education for all boys and girls by the year 2015. Here Bangladesh has to increase net enrolment rate from 73.7 percent in 1992 to 100 percent by 2015 and reduce primary school dropout rates from 38 percent in 1994 to 0

In its progress report, the overnment shows that the net enrollment rate (80 percent) has risen dramatically due to various government interventions like stipend, free book distribution, etc. although there is a big

context. The Education Watch Report shows that only 1.6 percent of pupils who completed five years can achieve measurable terminal

Bangladesh has to give attention to quality as well as increasing enrollment and decreasing dropout rate. A study by NRDS with the technical support by Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) 2004 shows that a regular student can get only 0.887 minutes per day from his all teachers jointly and the teacher/student ratio is 1:89 for government primary schools.

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

current share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector is 22 percent and the proportion of seats held by women in parliament is only 2

In Bangladesh, the female wage in the agriculture sector is 70 percent and in the nonagricultural sector 42 percent of male wage. According to one report, about 52 percent of female headed households now live below poverty line in the rural area. On the other hand, the areas of decision making such as the bureaucracy and high level jobs, which entails visibility and exercise of authority, women's

percent by 2010, reduce TFR to 2.2 y 2010, reduce maternal malnutrition to less than 20 percent by 2015, increase by two years the median age of girls at first marriage and eliminate violence against women. The PPRM found improvement satisfactory, with a mean value of 3.63 which refers to an improved and better situation compared to

#### the earlier situation. MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases

The Bangladesh government has estimated that the prevalence rate of HIV infection among adults (15-49 years) is less than 0.1 percent. As of end November

> mark with a mean score of 2.64. MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development

sustainability

According to the Forest Master

Plan and the Forestry Policy of

Bangladesh, only about 769,000

hectares or six percent of the

country has actual tree cover. This

includes the mangrove and the

planted forests. About 1.41 million

hectares of former forest is now

covered only by grass. Another

target for Bangladesh is to

increase coverage of safe water

from 99 percent to 100 percent in

urban areas and from 76 percent

(arsenic-adjusted estimate)

coverage to 96.5 percent in rural

areas by 2015. The PPRM shows

that plantation situation both in

private and household level is

improving with a score of 3.16 out

of 5 points, but water and

sanitation status is below the

In order to achieve these goals, a new global partnership for development -- based on stronger policies, good governance and a real sense of shared responsibility -- among stakeholders in both rich and poor countries is imperative. Support provided by such partnerships would be most effective in reducing poverty when it is given to poor countries with good economic policies and sound governance.

The target is to develop further an open trading and financial system that includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction, nationally and internationally, address the least developed countries special needs, and the special needs of landlocked and small-island developing states, deal comprehensively with developing countries debt problems, develop decent and productive work for

pharmaceutical companies provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries, in cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies especially information and communications technologies.

The GoB-UN report clearly pointed out the gaps in developed countries' promises in case of Bangladesh as quoted here: "Overseas development assistance (ODA) from countries belonging to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has been decreasing in recent years, both in real value and as a share of the GNI of donor countries. It has dropped from \$1.24 billion (0.28 percent of GNI) in 1996 to \$1.02 billion (0.22 percent of GNI) in 2001.

ODA to LDCs has also fallen from 0.06 percent of donors' GNI in 1996 to 0.05 percent in 2001. This is far from the target of 0.7 and 0.15 percent, respectively set as the MDG requirements for these indicators. It will need 5 percent of what the world now spending on arms and other means of destructions to meet MDGs by 2015.

The success and failure of the MDGs largely depend on the effective implementation of the last goal. The developed countries have a tendency to violate their commitments although they create pressure on the developing countries to keep their promises. World civil society has to play the key role of watch dog to monitor the internal governance system of developed countries to see whether they are keeping their promises or not.

Tanvirul Islam Dipu is a grassroots level

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question about the statistics presented here. Different government agencies show different figures about enrollment, dropout, and completion rate.

However, all the report shows that female enrollment, dropout and completion rate is much better than male. But the question is, what will happen if every child gets enrollment and completes the five years circle, will they even be able to write their name? PRSP nicely articulates that the education system in Bangladesh is not pro-poor; and the quality and content of education does not effectively serve the goals of human development and poverty reduction. So, the universal goal of increasing enrollment and reducing dropout rate is not a good match in the Bangladesh

The global target of MDGs is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015. Bangladesh has set the target to eliminate gender disparity in primary level from 55:45 in the base vear to 48:52, secondary education from 34:66 to 50:50, and from 25:75 to 50:50 in the tertiary level, preferably by 2005 and in all levels

of education no later than 2015. The progress report shows that the government has already achieved primary school level target (48:52) and in the secondary level it is about to achieve 52:48. But the largest disparity (36:64) exists in the tertiary level of education. The current ratio of literate females to males of 20-24 year olds is 55:71, which should be 100:100 by the year 2015. The

presence in negligible. MDG 4: Reduce child mortality

According to UNDP, on average in developing countries, for every 1.000 children, 100 die before the age of five. The target Bangladesh fixed was to reduce under-five mortality rate from 151 deaths per thousand live births in 1990 to 50 by 2015. The infant mortality rate deaths per 1,000 live birth was 94 in the base year and the current rate is 56. The proportion of one year old children immunized against measles went from 54 percent to 69 percent.

MDG 5: Improve maternal

Bangladesh fixed the target to reduce maternal mortality from 57.4 deaths per 10,000 live births in 1990 to 14.3 by 2015, increase the proportion of births attended by skilled birth personnel to 50

363 cases. Even though there is no functional reporting system on HIV/AIDS and the information remains incomplete, Bangladesh is classified as a low HIV prevalence country. Nevertheless. latest surveys indicate a rapid increase of HIV positivity among injection drug users (IDUs) from 1.7 percent in 2000 to 4 percent in 2002. Such concentrated HIV epidemic can have far reaching implications on HIV transmission to other vulnerable populations in the community. Bordered by eastern Indian states of high HIV/AIDS prevalent zone and continuing migration, Bangladesh is at high risk in the context of high population density

2003, the Ministry of Health and

Family Welfare reported a total of

MDG 7: Ensure environmental

## Efficiency in public administration

### Australian experience

ABMS ZAHUR

N Australia public servants are regarded as inherently inefficient and need to be watched closely to ensure that they do a fair day's work. One overwhelming reason is that government employees are financed from taxpayers' funds and as such it gives every taxpayer the right to express an opinion about the performance of those employed with public contribution. It is true that the larger government organisations pecome, the more financial and human resources they handle and the greater becomes the propensity for their misdemeanors to catch the public eye. The public service mistakes are to a large extent open to view unlike the affairs of the non-government bodies.

Unlike Bangladesh Australian public servants themselves accept the value system that they should operate as efficiently as possible. They strive for efficiency not because of criticism, but because it is their responsibility as public servants, owing a duty to the community, and as ordinary citizens. In attempting to distinguish between politics and administration it is often identified as a contrast between 'means' and 'ends.' Public servants would come to be viewed as experts on 'means' of doing things. If all the politics is taken out of the public servant's life the service would become a machine adopting the means to the desired ends. Bangladesh may consider seriously adopting such measure.

In natural sciences or engineering efficiency can be expressed as an input/output relationship. In social sciences, however, such precision of measurement is not possible. In fact 'efficiency' in human situations, is a relative and not an absolute concept. There have been attempts to define 'efficiency' within public administration, one of the main areas where this has occurred is in relation to promotion systems. Australia is one of the first countries in the world to prescribe efficiency as the first prerequisite of promotion. It regarded efficiency as being special qualification and aptitude for the discharge of a higher duty.

The public service board is charged with devising means for effecting economies and promoting efficiency in the management and workings of departments (Australian Public Service Act, section 17). The New South Wales Act speaks of 'fitness' rather than efficiency [New South Wales Public Service Act 49(2)]. This act has stated proper standards of efficiency and emphasised greatly on the inspectoral functions of the board to investigate the character of the work and the manner in

which the employees carry it out. as means towards that end [ibid section 9 (1)]. The Victoria Act is similar to Australian Public Service Act. The Queensland Act is silent on the question. The South Australia Act or Tasmanian Act is similar to that of Victoria. western Australian Public Service Act contains no details of how the board should encourage efficiency

Some management specialists in public organisations do not agree that well-defined images of efficiency cannot be introduced However, one can broadly compare the situations which apply in both cases. In both cases there are resources to be handled, human, financial and physical. Senior officials in both cases need to have common characteristics such as imagination, intellectual capacity, character, sensitivity, integrity, stamina and determination. There are also differences. One fundamental Moreover, most of the public organisations are not in competition with others as regards the provision of that service. It is very difficult for public organisations to control the size and nature of their own resources. Thus departments find it extremely difficult to dispense with the services of staff in slack times, or to augment their operating funds at short notice largely because of the need for justice throughout the whole government machinery. Consequently the flexibility which managers of private firms may enjoy is much less evident in a public service.

Senior public servants require an ability to work under a degree of constant newspaper, parliamentary and public observation, comment and criticism which is not known elsewhere. It is also contended that in financial matters the permanent head does not enjoy the autonomy of the general manager, or managing director. difference concerns the matter of In personal matters the responsibility, because permanent head must abide by

Public servants of Australia extensively make use of organisation and methods, operation research, automatic data processing and system analysis to streamline the machinery of government. Improvement is a continuous process. The quest for improving efficiency is always on. The ties between public and private organisations are growing closer.

effectiveness or efficacy is often more important than efficiency. Indeed it is often the case that provision of a particular service to the public has to be done rather inefficiently if it is to be handled effectively (in this case effectively means satisfying the vast majority of users). At times it is extremely difficult even to define clearly the goals of government. Another fundamental difference is that government undertakings operate on the principle of equity whereas private businesses are relatively free to serve the interests of whichever citizens they may choose. For government undertakings this enforces a measure of consistency in dealing with clients which is not as imperative for the private company.

There are operational dissimilarities, however. Public undertakings do not always function to make profits although a surplus can often be recorded. Profit or return on capital is a major criterion for judging business efficiency but this yardstick is rarely applicable in public administration, although there are many who still persist in ignoring this fact. In fact many government services are not charged for, so any return on capital invested can only comprise a vague esoteric amount of public satisfaction.

service-wide regulations as to the handling of recruitment, promotion, discipline and dismissal of staff. He must cooperate with the public service board, and abide by appeal mechanisms which are designed to ensure equality of treatment for all public servants. The point is that public administrators work in an environment which is much more complex than that of their business counterparts.

There are more practical problems in measuring efficiency in public administration. Efficiency is largely a means/end in relationship. It is possible to identify goals or objectives to define them in quantitative terms and then measure progress towards those objectives. In measuring this a number of quantitative indicators have been devised (such as staff/pupil ratios, or capital expenditure or total expenditure per head of population). However, these are only partial measures. There are reasonably satisfactory measures of inputs (such as cost per day of staff, food, drugs, maintenance etc). Calculation of outputs is, however, difficult. Some of the most serious dangers in introducing measurement of output in government are:

i) Attention will be directed only to those items which can be measured ignoring other

important factors.

ii) If government or private experts refuse to quantify certain inputs/outputs, administrators may resort to placing a value on them using solely their own judgement.

iii) Any attempt at quantifying goals or outputs may result in lisagreement within the

iv) It is often hard to calculate the contribution of each part of an organisation towards its goals.

v) Efficiency may become an end in itself (e.g. the traffic police may come to view his goal as writing tickets rather than

maintaining order). However it has to be accepted that public administrators can learn a good deal from various outside sources about modern methods of dealing with the resources at their disposal to achieve the effective, equitable and efficient results required.

A few words about scientific management. Public servants of Australia extensively make use of organisation and methods, operation research, automatic data processing and system analysis to streamline the machinery of government. Techniques such as accountable management and management by objectives are commonly used both in national and state public services to improve service efficiency.

One of the most interesting concepts in Australian public service is internal consultancy units to (a) investigate assigned problems for management, recommend changes and assist with implementation of agreed changes; (b) assist with staff development, training and education, and (c) undertake research and development of management systems and techniques. Due attention is also paid on improving working conditions for public servants. The wages and other fringe benefits for Australian public servants are regarded as more than generous.

Improvement is a continuous process. The quest for improving efficiency is always on. The ties between public and private organisations are growing closer. However, the real danger lies in the strong possibility of accepting the philosophy and practice developed by business as capable of being adopted in government organisations without proper thought. Another major danger is the possibility of hypnotic effect on public servants by the gimmicks of modern technological progress without considering their effect on the morale of staff, relation with clients and preservation of accountability to the public.

ABMS Zahur is a retired Joint Secretary

# Deadly game of politics

HE warm up for the next general election has begun in earnest. The two major parties have been wasting no time to form coalition of like-minded people to fight the 2007 election. The AL has already formed a 14party coalition and the BNP-Jamaat alliance has declared that they are going to expand this further. The second largest opposition party, JP (Ershad), appears to be the likely contender for such an expansion. In other words, if election takes place, the nation will be divided into two

Having said that, there is, however, a new deadly equation surfaced in the political arena with the campaign of the Islamists' suicide carnage and the PM taking hardline position against the opposition sensed from her speech at Paltan Maidan on 21 December. Under these circumstances, it looks like 2006 is going to be a bloodiest year in the history of the nation. Looking back, on this soil, so much blood has been shed during the last half a century that there is no parallel in any other parts of the subcontinent. This nation reached to such a point that, at any cost, politicians want to cling to power as if the seat of power is end of

everything that a short life can offer.

major political camps: a coalition

led by the AL and an alliance led by

the BNP. In a one camp preferred

basis the adult franchising pillar of

democracy in Bangladesh could not

The last fifteen years of democratic rule took more life than the preceding fifteen years of authoritarian rule. This may sound like us being a devil's advocate. But is not HM Ershad having a last laugh now? He may be even aspiring a comeback since he can see now that the nation is in such a mess through the hands of democratically elected leaders that the electorate might have a second thought in the future. Moreover, he knows well that out of fifteen years of so-called democracy, the last four years have been worse. The nation witnessed retaliation by the winning alliance against the voters of minority groups and opposition that went out of all proportion immediately after the 2001 election. Next, the state sponsored initiatives like Operation Clean Heart (so-called victims of heart attacks), RAB, Cheeta, Kobra (socalled victims of crossfire) have been institutionalised to gag criminals but also to punish opponents.

Outside these operations, there have been sporadic deadly incidents of bomb and grenade attacks on the leaders and workers of the main opposition and a Bangladesh born UK diplomat. And, now, a non-stop suicide bombing has been bleeding the entire nation allegedly with the support of an arm of the incumbent.

What is going on? Why under a democratic practice the nation has to give all those lives and destroy so many families? Any rational person would agree that the place is in such a mess that it does not look like this bloodied democracy game would The ball is certainly in the government's court now. This is a challenge that will make or break whatever credibility the government has with the electorate in the era of deadly game of politics. The PM and her party seemingly have no other alternatives than to sit down with the opposition with a meaningful framework of dialogue which the opposition would dare to miss if it wants to remain in the game.



The PM addressing the Paltan rally December 21/05

end before staging another 1971 godfathers are at large and have style blood bath on this soil. We argued earlier in this forum that crime, cadre and corruption (triple-C) are synonymous with our type of democracy. Under our democracy, a minister never loses job even caught red handed as a godfather in disguise or as looter of nation's wealth in a broad daylight. It is not only ministers, if one happens to be a government party lawmaker, world appears to them as free for all. Without naming the names, we have been witnessing this occurring year after year and regimes after

This was not why the people fought for independence in 1971 and for the removal of the authoritarian rules in 1990. After all these sacrifices, what the nation gets are more and more godfathers, their bloodthirsty cadres and mindless corruption. It is not inappropriate to say that our politicians have been treating the eople at contempt for too long and deadly game of politics has engulfed us all. It is beyond imagination that a young Bangalee Muslim will sacrifice his/her life for killing fellow Muslims for no reason

Under the present circumstance, the time has come to ask, for whose politics are we running after? politics for godfathers? politics for clinging to power at any cost? or politics for grabbing power? One would perhaps say that in the present day Bangladesh all these are true. While it may be right, from our viewpoint, many politicians unfortunately have become the godfather-making machines than the lawmakers for the nation. Between the period of 1991 and 2001, the godfathers of successive governments and the oppositions had been localised. Now, the

been roaming nationwide. Localised godfathers while made Bangladesh a nation of political assassins, the nationwide godfathers, like JMB militant leaders, are transforming the nation into a killing field.

What happened at Netrokona on the other day cannot be put in words. Who were the people the suicide bomber(s) have killed and injured? The ordinary bystanders and the members of the law enforcing agencies. Due to ignorance about the power of bombs these people were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were there to see the bomb that failed to go off in the first attempt in front of a cultural office (according to media report). In seconds later many were killed and injured. It is madness and barbaric to say the least. But the administration has no clue, and no progress in the inquiry is in sight. So-called Islamist godfathers seem have taken on well

our free-for-all democracy. Those who tried to raise voice against the godfathers, religious or otherwise, were either killed or threatened to keep their mouth shut. For instance, SAMS Kibria of AL, Professor Humayun Azad of Dhaka University and Abu Hena (still survives) of BNP, to name a few. Unfortunately, the government of the day is currently on a rat race against the opposition for creating human seas at Paltan Maidan and in other parts of the nation. This is utterly a wrong priority and wastage of scarce resources and energy of a sitting government that could be engaged in freeing the nation from militants. The government is acting like an opposition in keeping the street under capture. It is not inappropriate to claim that organisation of mammoth public

gathering such as this by any sitting government often acts as breeding ground of political godfathers. It was alleged and also came to media that on 21 December million of taka was transacted between the cadres and the hired participants. Whatever, this is not the kind of democracy people want to see after fifteen years of elected governments. No wonder why we are now on the top of the corruption ladder and the game of politics becoming deadlier day by day with  $the \, support \, of \, the \, god fathers.$ The ball is certainly in the

government's court now. This is a challenge that will make or break whatever credibility the government has with the electorate in the era of deadly game of politics. The PM and her party seemingly have no other alternatives than to sit down with the opposition with a meaningful framework, we repeat a meaningful framework, of dialogue which the opposition would dare to miss if it wants to remain in the game. If history is a guide, all the governments that applied force to face opposition on the street had little success ultimately. Our leaders are living examples who led and fought against the authoritarian rules fifteen years back. However, we the Bangalees allegedly known as being notoriously famous of having short memory and our leaders always living within the four walls of godfathers and sycophants. On top of these, this time, a fundamentalist party is also sharing the power and they had the reputation of being the deadliest of all. In view of the above, we hope, at last, commonsense will prevail with our leaders to act avoid further blood letting on this soil.

Dr Moazzem Hossain is a freelance contributor.