

Poverty alleviation

Total national effort needed for the success of PRSP

THE draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has been designed to fulfil the long-felt need for having a comprehensive plan to alleviate poverty in the country. Its authors have claimed that it's a home-grown, doable anti-poverty plan which seeks to extricate the nation out of poverty by the year 2015.

The draft PRSP sets a goal that the nation has to achieve if it is to take off economically. However, there are certain problems and limitations which need to be resolved, or at least lessened, before the PRSP can attain its objectives. Corruption and wastage of resources, for example, still pose a serious threat to proper execution of any development strategy. Unfortunately, the quality of governance that is needed to curb these maladies is missing in our context.

There is a contradiction in our economic profile in that some social indicators are very positive but social inequities remain in the absence of distributive justice. The result is that the benefits of growth are not reaching the general people. Obviously, poverty reduction in the ultimate analysis will depend on creation of a socio-economic order where the fruits of development will be shared equally by the people. This is the overarching poverty alleviation issue.

The draft plan sounds realistic in the sense that the possibility of reduced export growth rate, as envisaged in it, cannot be ruled out in the post-MFA era. It poses a challenge to the development planners and so does the decline in farm sector production. The government must adopt rejuvenation measures to maximise agricultural productivity.

We believe these are the basic premises upon which the PRSP has been developed. The sustained GDP growth that the plan aims to achieve can materialise only if private investment goes up along with an increased FDI inflow. We have to, however, create an atmosphere that proves congenial to the realisation of such objectives.

If the political and law and order situations do not improve progressively, the goals envisaged in the PRSP will be hard to attain within the stipulated time.

Therefore, we put emphasis on not just the political will of the government but also the extended use of it to draw the opposition parties into a dialogue for the sake of a total national effort going into the implementation of poverty alleviation strategies.

Textbook distribution

Kudos for a good step

THE government initiative to distribute approximately 9 crore textbooks to students in time for the academic year beginning this January can only be considered a worthwhile idea.

This scheme of textbook distribution is an acknowledgement by the government that in order to bring education to the masses it is not sufficient merely to build schools and to hire teachers, but that the government must also affirmatively help low-income children come to school.

The problem that many low-income families face is that even sending their children to school to avail themselves of the ostensibly free education that is on offer actually costs them considerable sums of money. First and foremost among the expenses parents must incur are those for textbooks.

This is why the textbook distribution initiative is such a good idea. It enables parents to actually avail themselves of the other advantages that have been opened up to them with respect to their children's schooling, and without measures such as textbook distribution, funds spent elsewhere can end up of use only to a limited number of families, and leave behind many of those who need the assistance the most.

The distribution drive is, however, a massive undertaking, and we hope that the administration is equal to the task. The efficacy of a government programme often lies in the efficiency of its implementation, and this one is no exception.

In addition, we would urge the government to follow up not only by ensuring the success of this scheme, but to also address the issues such as curriculum, teacher training, adequacy of facilities, etc. that require its close attention if the nation is to provide meaningful and effective access to a good education available to everyone.

Sound educational foundations are the key to our development as a nation. Distributing textbooks to those who need them and who otherwise might have difficulty attending school is a good start, but only as part of a sincere broader commitment.

Why this inefficiency?

M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

WHILE addressing the secretaries to the government on December 30, 2004 at the Bangladesh Secretariat, the Prime Minister regretted, "The documents once prepared at the tables of deputy secretaries and joint secretaries are now being done through appointment of consultants." This comment of the Prime Minister is nothing but an expression of her utter disappointment for the inefficiency at higher echelons of the civil administration. This article, therefore, makes an attempt to identify the reasons that led to serious deterioration in the efficiency at the higher echelons of the bureaucracy with particular reference to the working in the Bangladesh Secretariat, commonly known as the seat of the government.

When the East Pakistan Province of Pakistan emerged as independent and sovereign Bangladesh in 1971, the civil service system introduced by the British in the Indian sub-continent and inherited by Pakistan, continued in Bangladesh under Laws Continuance Enforcement Order dated, Mujibnagar, April 10, 1971. The predecessors of Bangladesh Civil Service -- the British Indian Civil Service, All Pakistan Services, the Central Superior Services of Pakistan and the East Pakistan Civil Service -- were regarded as efficient and effective. The members of these services were recruited through well-conceived recruitment policies. It needs no repetition that a sound recruitment policy puts premium on merit rather than on any other consideration. But the then government recruited in 1973 a large number of bureaucrats from amongst the freedom fighters without properly going through the Public Service Commission's (PSC) long established procedure of recruitment.

Again, in the early eighties the then government recruited a large number of magistrates through condensed examination to man the newly created Upazilas. A government notification dated, the 7th December, 1982 says that 'the government may make appointment to the Bangladesh Civil Service (Administrative) for one time recruitment to the post of Magistrate specified in the Schedule on the basis of test in the following: (a) Viva voce: 200 marks; (b) psychological test and intelligence test: 100 marks. The age limit of the

services jointly undergo foundation training at the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Institute (BPATC), which is followed by training at the institute/academy of the respective cadre service. Since the seniority of the officers of a particular batch is determined by the PSC on the basis of marks obtained in the written examinations and viva-voce at the initial point of entry into the service, they do not take these trainings seriously.

Further, for promotion to the posts of joint secretary and addi-

responsibilities, those officers who have gained sufficient experience in the posts of joint secretary and additional secretary or in equivalent posts and have satisfactory service records should be given the charge of secretary. If my memory does not fail, there is no instance to show that between mid-seventies and mid-nineties any officer belonging to the erstwhile All Pakistan Services, the Central Superior Services of Pakistan or the East Pakistan Civil Service was made secretary-in-charge before serving in the post of joint secretary

one of the Central Superior Services of Pakistan, was created in the early 1960s in order to increase efficiency and sustain continuity in the working of the central secretariat. The young and brilliant boys and girls having university degrees were appointed to this service through the combined central superior services examinations conducted by the Central Public Service Commission. This was replicated in the then East Pakistan through the creation of EPSS. The officers belonging to the BCS (Secretariat) were normally trans-

expertise. Seventhly, many officers at the level of deputy secretary and joint secretary are weak in English. This is primarily because of the fact that they received their higher education in Bangla medium. Further, according to existing law, save only that of making correspondence with the foreign countries, development partners or in similar other cases, the officers shall have to use Bangla in their official work. But proficiency in English becomes necessary when a ministry has to (i) prepare its five-year plan, two-year plan, rolling plan; (ii) develop project ideas, project briefs, project concept papers etc. in respect of the projects to be financed by the development partners; (iii) negotiate with the development partners the terms and conditions for financing a project(s); (iv) represent the government in inter-governmental meetings; (v) represent the government in international and regional bodies; and in many other similar cases. In such cases, hiring of consultants has become a normal phenomenon.

To conclude, in a developing country like Bangladesh, highly capable and carefully trained civil servants are required for execution of approved policies, preparation of new policy, formulation and execution of new development programmes, management of international relations etc. The governments will render a great service to the nation if they follow a non-partisan policy for promoting officials to the mid-level and senior level posts in the Bangladesh Secretariat and arrange for extensive training of the civil servants on skill development to prepare them to face the challenges of the 21st century.

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M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former secretary

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candidates for appointment to the aforesaid post of Magistrate was fixed between 21 and 50 years.' The core element for selection of suitable persons in the service of the Republic was done away with in both the above cases. These officers are now holding the posts of deputy secretary and above in different ministries.

Secondly, the Prime Minister rightly pointed out that there was no alternative to training and building up talents, skills and knowledge-based administrative mechanism, and she thus asked the authorities concerned to ensure formulation and implementation of training programmes for the newly recruited officers as part of human resource development. But our training programmes and follow-up actions suffer from certain weaknesses. Presently, the newly recruited officers of different cadre

secretary, the officers at the level of deputy secretary and joint secretary are required to successfully complete, respectively, the advanced course on administrative development and the senior staff course. But instances are there to prove that some officers have been promoted to these posts without their participation in these courses. In the absence of effective linkage between promotion and training, the officers at the aforementioned levels do not take these training courses seriously.

Thirdly, disposal of business in a ministry is teamwork. The secretary of a ministry has to provide leadership to the team. He has to provide guidance to his deputy secretaries and joint secretaries as to how a policy paper, a summary for the Cabinet or any other important paper has to be prepared. Since the secretaries have to shoulder the highest bureaucratic

or in equivalent post(s) for at least seven years and for a year or more in the post of additional secretary or in equivalent post(s). But in recent days, this principle is rarely followed. The government must not forget that there is no substitute for experience.

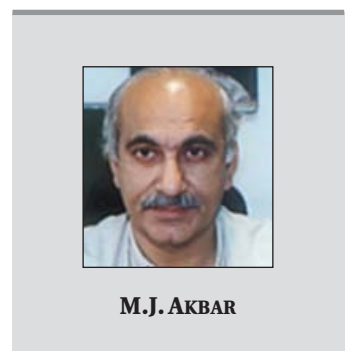
Fourthly, there is widespread allegation that promotions to the posts of joint secretary and above have been highly politicised. There are instances of large-scale supersession of the seniors by the juniors allegedly on political considerations. This has not only led to heart-burning of the former but also discouraged them to discharge their assigned duties sincerely.

Fifthly, under the Bangladesh Civil Services (Reorganisation) Order, 1980 the erstwhile Central Secretariat Service (CSS) and the East Pakistan Secretariat Service (EPSS) were grouped together and termed BCS (Secretariat). The CSS,

ferred from one ministry to another and in this process they became the storehouse of information on matters relating to transaction of government business and developed their expertise on policy formulation, planning and other areas that are important for top-level management. In 1992 the government, without an in-depth study, yielded to a pressure group's demand to abolish the BCS (Secretariat) cadre and merge it with the BCS (Administration) cadre. This has seriously affected development of expertise and sustenance of continuity in the Bangladesh Secretariat.

Sixthly, very little attention is paid to the career development of officers. Educational background, specialised training, working experience etc. receive little consideration while posting an officer in the ministries. This amounts to misuse of his/her knowledge and

The future is bright



M. J. AKBAR

IT'S natural: in the first week of January every right-thinking Indian wants to know what will happen in the coming year. The problem is not uncertain vision, or the inability to predict. The worry is that truth outstrips the wildest imagination or the bravest astrologer. Take a test. Stand on the edge of a decade and let the options in your mind scream on the brink of impossibility. Truth, you will discover, has been stranger than any fantasy. Who could have stared at the horizons of Eurasia in 1990 and seen the implosion of the Soviet Union? Who, in the confident America of 2000, could have seen the twin towers of the World Trade Center being blown out of the sky? You can start at the top and run down a pretty long list of impossibles that have become contemporary realities.

So it may be a much safer call to check out what will not happen this year. Will not? Sorry, amendment needed. May not. For the one thing you can be certain about in life is uncertainty.

1: The wise in Delhi appreciate that power is both transient and limited, but only the very foolish surrender power senselessly. The coalition in power in Delhi has problems, but folly is not one of them. Contradictions will spurt

through, but they will also be managed. The operating principle will be: a Cabinet position in hand is worth two in the bush. Moreover, Dr Manmohan Singh is not vulnerable to the traditional Delhi disease, flattery. So he is not going to slip on the grease with which every politician is massaged every morning. It will therefore be a year of status quo, at the Centre and in most of the states (most, because February will see the departure of Om Prakash Chautala in Haryana and the BJP in Jharkhand). This is good news for the ruling coalition,

meantime, will plan for the impossible by stretching the scenario through awkward questions. What happens to the Sunni insurgency in case the Shias form a government in Baghdad? Does it reach an accommodation and spread its net into Saudi Arabia? What are the implications for the House of Saud in that case? What will be the Iranian response to an American-Israeli threat to its nuclear capabilities? Nuclear power has become synonymous with nationalism in Iran and Pakistan; can America afford to provoke Iranian national-

Arafat was a poster-boy terrorist. Think.

3: India's biggest private sector industry, cricket, will head in only one direction: the bank. The faded, jaded Sourav Ganguly will remain captain till he is 50 years old or Jagmohan Dalmiya 75, whichever comes first. The dispute between Sharad Pawar and Dalmiya over the elections to the BCCI will remain in the courts till after Pawar's elected term is over, which means Dalmiya wins even if he doesn't. Doordarshan will telecast

Ambani giving him plenipotentiary powers over all interior design decisions in any Ambani office worldwide, including the international headquarters of Crocodile Investments. On the advice of astrologers and haute couture consultants from Paris, Anil Ambani will stop wearing black, the colour of Rahu and so yesterday in any case. Special yagnas will be organised to eliminate the impact of Rahu, currently in occupation of Aries, Anil's presiding star. Simultaneously, other yagnas will be done, on behalf of Mukesh, to

Modi will continue to ignore her. Atal Behari Vajpayee will bring the House down four times in the Budget session, twice with quips on Lulu Yadav and twice with speeches on the future of the nation if the Bihar pattern of voting is repeated nationally.

6: Lulu Yadav and Rabri Devi will not settle outstanding tax claims on income from the milk of their private herd of 270 cows which will, by the end of 2005, cross Rs 5 crores. Lulu Yadav will explain that the results of the Assembly elections have vindicated his stand on income tax. Lulu Yadav will announce the creation of 200,000 more jobs in the railway budget of 2005, for young persons between the age of 32 and 42, bearing the surname Yadav from the districts of Barh, Chapra, Nalanda, and Madhepura, trained in special martial capabilities in order to end crime and terrorism in Indian Railways. Dr Manmohan Singh will be sorely tempted to change Lulu's portfolio from railways to fishing but will be restrained by the taciturn hand of Sonia Gandhi.

7: The state of Telangana will not come into existence by November 1, 2005, one year after the deadline for mayhem on the streets and pillage in the villages. However, a subcommittee to examine regional demands in the light of socio-economic conditions in 1954 and agricultural-industrial prospects in 2032 will start gathering evidence on the feasibility of smaller states in the Indian archipelago/subcontinent within the parameters of overall development in the IT sector. The chairman of the subcommittee will be an economist of the World Bank with visiting rights to Hyderabad.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE
The BJP will not accept defeat at a national conclave of the party in the last week of 2005. In a special resolution drafted by Pramod Mahajan and seconded by rising star Satpal Malik the weather will be given its due share of the blame; if it had rained earlier in the summer of 2004 the base vote would have come out and tilted the balance in 36 Lok Sabha constituencies, including Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

but worrying for the Congress because its aspirations are, justifiably, far above its present status. A squeeze in Bihar and a squish in Uttar Pradesh cannot be comfortable, status-wise. But to change things would risk the status in the coalition, so status quo.

2: The military forces of George Nero Bush will not leave Iraq, despite casualty levels at least as high as they were in 2004. A conflagration never frightens Nero, but acts as an aphrodisiac. The Bush expectation is that an elected government in Baghdad will administer the country, or those parts of it that are willing to accept the rule of Baghdad, while American troops, living in modern Crusader fortresses, protect the oil and retain the right to swoop where they want in search of prey that is considered hostile to American interests. The Pentagon, in the

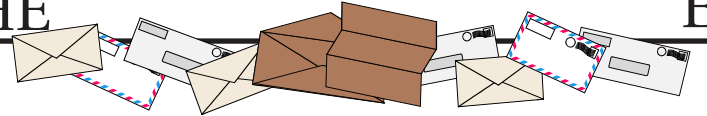
Indo-Pak cricket series since Subhash Chandra's offer for telecast rights will be substantially denied by his legal bills. Lawyers will also be the principal beneficiaries of the war between the Birlas and Lodha for an alleged Rs 5,000 crore bequest. Alleged, because no one has counted. Sachin Tendulkar will make three more centuries until he crosses the SPE (Saturation Point of Exposure) Index: that is, consumers begin to reject products that he advertises. Zahir Khan and Irfan Pathan will alternate in the team due to injury problems. Harbhajan Singh will go straight and join the Zee cricket commentary team.

4: The fourth anniversary of India's biggest private sector dispute will be celebrated with prayers at Tirupati, Hardwar and Mathura by Anil Ambani, and six board room resolutions by Mukesh

persuade Rahu to carry on what he is doing, and not be in such a tearing hurry to move away from Aries. Both brothers will laugh whenever seen in public, either singly or together.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Tiny torturers

We, the people of Chawkbazar in Chittagong, are facing numerous problems. And mosquito is one of them. Mosquito has become a menace to us these days. As soon as night comes, mosquitoes "attack" us from all directions. Malaria and Dengue are spreading rapidly because of mosquitoes. We use mosquito coils, sprays and mosquito curtains. Yet, the mosquitoes are there.

It is time the authorities did something to alleviate the mosquito menace.

Mahbuba Tamanna
Chawkbazar, Chittagong

Pull out rickshaws

I think most of the city dwellers appreciate the government's plan to pull out rickshaws gradually from the city. Rickshaws cause loss of time and traffic congestion. They should not exist in a modern metropolis.

MD Atiq Uddin
Jahangirnagar University

Whither decentralisation reforms?

Successive regimes are neglecting the impact of economic activities and social living conditions in Dhaka metropolis. The main culprit is the delay in decentralisation reforms, which is encouraging people to settle in Dhaka or travel frequently for business purposes.

Dhaka is bursting and getting out of control, judging from the reports (DS Dec 26 and earlier) on the REHAB housing Fair, where the crowd has not diminished even after doubling the entrance ticket. The land prices in the greater Dhaka zone have sky-rocketed, and the wetlands and water surfaces are being filled up indiscriminately, thanks to the patronisation of the culture of corruption (we are world's No 1 for the last four years).

The main complaint is that the divisional and district headquarters have not been geared up to provide one-stop public services. The ghost of the preceding auto-

cratic presidential regimes is still haunting the democratically-elected popular peoples' governments.

The inflation in the political market has risen to absurd levels. The crash will have to come soon, and it is unavoidable, as the foundation of "political science" is shaky. The stupor in political leadership is akin to nasha of the drug addicts--there is nothing wrong so long my world looks rosy".

We are facing several demons simultaneously: bad politics; corrupt practices; and terrorism in many aspects of public and private lives. What the major political parties are doing? Chasing each other! The civil service is supposed to mother the public affairs, but it is now catering to private and party affairs. When housekeepers cannot keep house, the nation is going to suffer. Leaking politics, leaking bureaucracy, or leaking morals (and pockets)?

For centuries, centralisation acted as an anchor in native concept in the untrained and undisci-

plined human interface. Practising the right models of democracy has also taken many centuries, but in the affluent nations it is displayed as a decoy for colonisation, in its various forms and dimensions, visible and invisible.

Empires came and evaporated, and now Western Economics is facing a crash, with the international Dollar in deep trouble (the inevitable cumulative effect). The latter cannot come out of the trap, as the Americans cannot come out of Iraq. It is the beginning of the end. It is not the clash, but the crash of the flag-bearing civilisation (one third of the global population, at the expense of the other two thirds). The compound interest would be extracted in the coming decades, if not the current century, and the next.

The narrow-minded regimes in the third world have to look ahead at the danger signals ahead. The awareness campaign has not even been drafted! The road is uneven, and the focus is on the next step ahead. Can't raise the gaze to discern the horizon, for employing

foresight and judgement.

The concept of unity does not sell today; inside a society (the overtones of political culture), and outside, in international affairs (pre-emptive strikes). Where is the starting point? Re-invent monopoly? Alif Zabr
Dhaka

Rab

Now most of the people living in Bangladesh are keeping Rab's contact numbers in their pockets. For hard-pressed innocent citizens Rab is the only hope. Conventional law enforcers and the justice department could not do much for ordinary citizens. Today our country and society have come to a point where no killer gets punished, rather they issue death threats to the victim's near and dears.

If people observe such positive action by the government then they will support it with all their resources. And thus we will see a

safe Bangladesh.

A citizen
On mail

Dowry

We are living in a world of free trade economy. We are living in a world where 'Globalisation' is a common term used by the people almost everywhere, where the availability of modern technology as well as the consciousness of the people are increasing day by day.

But in such a 'so called' civilised world what is the real condition of our women? Yes! their legs are tied with the hard shackles of 'dowry'. In our society it has now become a common practice.

Some people term the word 'dowry' as a curse for the society. But is it really a curse? The question arises, because some rich and also some middle class families in urban areas do not take the word in its usual meaning or sense. They term it as 'gift'. So, all the furniture, ornaments, money or household articles that are given and taken by

both sides do not create any sense of guiltiness in their mind. On the other hand, the case is totally different in rural areas, where women have to face a grave consequence for this.

Though we are talking about development, our real position is hundred miles far away from that path. That is also because we have not yet clearly identified 'dowry' as a social crime. We have education, but our education is yet to enlighten us.

There should be a social movement against this menace.

Rifat Munir Eti
Chittagong University

New Year

The New Year has arrived, as we follow the Gregorian Calendar in our everyday life, the importance of it is indisputable. Each year we look forward to a better future, a year full of peace and happiness. The year 2004, was not a happy one, many countries suffered from natural calamities, accidents,

violence etc. Iraq and Palestine are still bleeding from the unjust acts of America and Israel. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's death made us very sad. It was a great loss to the people of Palestine.

The opposition Leader of Ukraine had been poisoned, he is lucky to have survived.

GW Bush became president of the United States for the second term, it was a real blow to us, we never thought the people of America would choose a person who is so disliked all over the world.

It seems that nothing is going well in the world, still we dream for brighter days, human beings to be united on a common platform, righteousness to triumph over injustice.

I am praying to the Almighty to save us from the evil forces and wishing a very 'Happy New Year' to everyone.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong