

## PRSP under severe time-pressure

Turn it into a living document

THE much-vaunted Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) entitled "Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction" has at long last been okayed and adopted by the National Economic Council. Originally envisaged as having a three-year timeframe, the PRSP has made its appearance 18 months too late, but redeemingly, as a full-fledged document, a perfected version over the interim PRSP formulated in March, 2003. While welcoming its advent, we cannot help notice that it's going to be a race against time as far as implementing the time-bound programme goes.

The government has claimed that the PRSP has been framed fully on its own initiative and it will be financed out of 14 percent resources of the GDP -- 10 percent of which will be mobilised internally, while the rest four percent will come from external sources. Much that we welcome the striving toward self-reliance, it is going to be a huge revenue collection effort alright. Judging by our experience, this will be a very challenging job.

The other point is that the PRSP will be implemented, we are told, in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The problem here is that we are lagging behind insofar as the attainment of some of the MDGs are concerned. Still it is worth the effort since it is a target-oriented national development undertaking aiming to reduce poverty on a sustainable basis.

The poverty reduction strategy has some other ingredients that, we believe, will change things for the better. The idea of introducing online tenders should be extended a bit further by insisting that all prescribed forms for delivery of services be filled out online. It will help reduce wastage of time and corruption. Then the plan to recruit talented people from the private sector for government jobs to bring about a qualitative change in management and administration should pay dividends as well.

The decision to strengthen participatory local government system by holding Upazila and Zila Parishad elections is a commendable one, for local government bodies are always expected to play a crucial role in poverty alleviation. Rewarding good work by Union Councils will also work as an incentive for the local government body to perform better.

The provision for review, monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP will help it remain on track. We have to know where we stand and whether the PRSP is attaining its goals. The government has a little more than a year of its present tenure to make it work. That by itself is a formidable challenge.

## Surprising water shortages

Better management of the resource imperative

THE demonstration held this week by residents of Dhaka city's old town protesting frequent disruptions in their water supply is only the latest reminder of the acute water crisis that this metropolis has been facing in recent times. Water scarcity in Chittagong city too, has taken a serious turn. Water is the most basic of resources, and in a country such as ours that is criss-crossed with water bodies, the only reason for shortage of potable and usable water is lack of proper attention to the issue on the part of the relevant authorities.

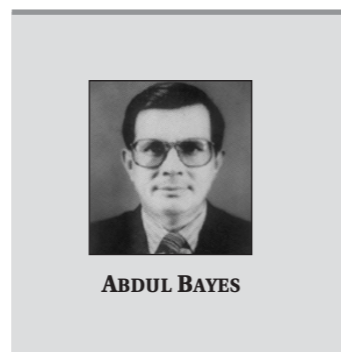
There is no defence for water shortages in this riverine land of ours. Indeed, when a small country faces both floods and droughts, it is a definite sign that the problem is one of management of water resources. This is where the role of the authorities comes in. It is the responsibility of the authorities to ensure that the country's waterways remain clean and unpolluted and that water that is safe for drinking, cooking and washing is available to all.

However, what we have seen over the years is that even as the country is inundated with floods on an annual basis, the availability of safe water continues to dwindle. Waterways are encroached upon or have sewage dumped in them, rendering them unusable and filthy, the water table has dropped dramatically, and the most fundamental necessity of life has become scarce.

Where should the government start in tackling the problem? The first thing is to acknowledge that this is a problem and to draw up a comprehensive plan that takes into account the needs of the population and the amount of water available. Concerted action to clean up the waterways and to ensure that the water table is not further depleted is key. There must be a balanced use of both subsoil and surface water.

Part of the problem has to do with the high level system loss that results in a great amount of water being wasted. We cannot afford such profligacy. Astonishingly, the amount of good water available per head is currently less than half of what is recommended by experts. The simple fact of the matter is that if a government cannot adequately provide even this most basic of necessities, it is fair for the people to ask what it can do.

# False arguments and falsifying failures?



ABDUL BAYES

TWO weeks ago, I wrote a piece for this column titled: "Four years of false hopes." In that note, I tried to argue that the high hopes for the country since the present government assumed power on October 10, 2001 had been dashed during the last four years. Due to paucity of space and time, I had to pick only a few pertinent points for analysis. Anyway, Maj. Gen. (Retd) Z.A. Khan recently reacted sharply to my submissions in a piece titled: "False hopes or falsifying achievements?" and dubbed my writing as a "biased" presentation that, allegedly, ignored some of the praiseworthy activities of the government.

Allow me to delve deep into the dynamics of analysing the performance of a particular government. It may be noted here that if my submissions were "biased" because I had overlooked the "brilliant" performances of the present government then, by the same token, Mr. Khan's submission could also be termed as "biased" as it only criticised the last Awami League (AL) government without any appreciation of the works done during 1996-2001.

I think that every government does some good and some bad works. The moot concern should be the relative

weight of the good and the bad. My personal observation is that a rational writer has a duty to raise the issue of the weaknesses of the government if only to enable it to improve its performance. There are a lot of institutions and instruments available to learn about the so-called successes of the government. Among them are, for example, the press and electronic media under the government's control, the sycophants living under the

past norm appears to be zero. But, as Mr. Khan and we all know, the present government assured us that, once in power, they would uproot corruption from the society. This is false hope and not achievements falsified.

Third, during the AL regime, no complaint could be heard against any minister on charge of corruption. But during the last four years, we heard complaints of corruption against ministers. For example, the

Khaleda Zia was attacked (and Mr. Khan accompanied her during the time of occurrences) on her way to different places. We continue to denounce such attempts any time and anywhere. But that cannot be compared with grenade attack heralded on August 21 to kill the leader of the present opposition and her party colleagues. The extra agencies created recently with the motive of containing terrorism are criticised on the ground

how helpless the CEC could turn out to be under the present government.

The Daily Star report cards on ministers and ministries do not seem to deviate much from what we tend to write in our columns. But as opposed to Mr. Khan's thesis of "achievements falsified," the reality on the ground rides on a different horse. The inflation rate is ever high at nearly 10 per cent, the growth rate in the economy hovers around 5.3 per cent per year which is

pared to the past.

The soaring rise of prices of essentials is a problem. Market economy also worked during the last regime. Why then are the prices of essentials out of reach, especially of the poor, now and were not then? It is, to my mind, because the earlier government could tackle market failures through judicious use of government instruments. There was close coordination among finance, food, agriculture, commerce, and industry ministries, and the ministries worked with much more devotion and efficiency than we seem to see now.

Remember, a market fails when a government fails. The missing market should be searched out in the missing performance of the government. The achievement that during the last four years reserves rose high says little about the current conundrums. If we cannot utilise the reserves to raise investment and the standard of living of the people, we can see that accumulation of reserves is a necessary but not sufficient condition for furthering economic growth.

And last but not least, the rise of fundamentalist forces and their activities during the last four years have been a curse on the nation. We would not, perhaps, blame the government in terms of facing the forces now, but obviously the government has to bear the blame for not having chased away the devil when it knocked on the door long before. The connection of the militant forces with the party in power, as revealed from statements of the arrestees, also points to the growth of these forces under the umbrella of the present government.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

The inflation rate is ever high at nearly 10 per cent, the growth rate in the economy hovers around 5.3 per cent per year which is not higher than in the previous regime. During the last AL government, the growth rate of GDP rose from an average of 4.7 per cent to an average of 5.6 per cent. Poverty level went down at 1.3 per cent per year during the earlier period compared to 0.50 per cent annually during the present regime.

government's support, the party activists, the ministries, etc. Therefore, unless some one is a "free lunch" writer who digs out deals from government, one should try one's utmost to air the ailments instead of praising the government.

Just think of one issue -- corruption. Mr. Khan is of the view that Bangladesh emerged as champion in corruption during the last AL regime. If for the sake of brevity we take the argument as truth, we must say that out of five years in office, the dishonour was bestowed only once. But compared to that, during the last four years of the present government's tenure, the "championship trophy" came to our country for the fourth time, and if it happens for the fifth time during the tenure of the present government, we shall have to live with that. Second, if we were champions in corruption during AL time and we continue to be so till now, then the degree of deviation from the

Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Transport raised figures against the communication minister and his ministry for the alleged corruption relating to CNG taxis and other issues. The Danish embassy pinpointed a particular minister and ministry for alleged involvement in bribes. The state minister for energy was sacked for alleged association with Niko on monetary deals. We can, perhaps, show a few other examples, but suffice it to say that we noticed no exemplary punishments against those involved in corruption. It should clearly be borne in mind that one of the most important (in fact the only one) determinants of corruption is that corrupt people do get away with their corruption.

One can perhaps raise a few questions on the deteriorating law and order situation. Mr. Khan argued that during the last AL government the then leader of the opposition Begum

that they resort to extra judicial-killing that goes against human rights. Could we ask a question: how many BNP MPs and intellectuals were killed during AL regime and how many such AL supporters have been killed so far during the last four years?

These days, The Daily Star has been carrying out an evaluation of the ministers and ministries. If the newspaper is considered as non-partisan and if we assume that Mr. Khan has time to go through the pieces, one could easily conclude that during the last four years, the energy ministry was in shambles, the local government institutions under the aegis of LGRD were destroyed, and other ministers and ministries could not live up to their expectations. We saw that during the municipal election of Sandip Pourashava, not a single voter turned out for fear of terrorism -- a record in the arena of electoral attempts in this country. We saw, and continue to see,

not higher than in the previous regime. During the last AL government, the growth rate of GDP rose from an average of 4.7 per cent to an average of 5.6 per cent. But no progress seems to be in evidence on that account during the last four years. Poverty level went down at 1.3 per cent per year during the earlier period compared to 0.50 per cent annually during the present regime. That means, it would have taken us 20 years to eradicate poverty under the earlier pace of poverty reduction, while it will need forty years under the existing pace.

The fact that the pace of poverty reduction has slowed down could be guessed from the fact that the growth rate did not pick up and agricultural and rural development did not fare well. There does not seem to be any coordination among ministries to deal with pervasive poverty. Just take the case of agricultural growth and you will find no remarkable progress com-

## CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX

# Frequently asked questions and answers

DR. IFTAKHARUZZAMAN  
What is CPI?

The CPI, prepared under the auspices of the Berlin-based international anti-corruption organisation Transparency International (TI), ranks countries annually in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. It is a composite index, a poll of polls, drawing on corruption-related data from expert surveys carried out by a variety of reputable institutions. It reflects the views of businesspeople and analysts from around the world, including experts who are locals in the countries evaluated.

**Is it right to conclude that the country with the lowest score in terms of CPI is the world's most corrupt country?**

No. The country with the lowest score is the one where corruption is perceived to be the highest among those included in the list. The index is a measure of perception about the level of corruption -- it does not and cannot brand a country or nation as corrupt. Moreover, there are almost 200 sovereign nations in the world, of which the CPI ranks about 150. CPI provides no information about the countries that are not included.

**What then is implied by Bangladesh's ranking according to CPI?**

According to CPI, corruption in Bangladesh has been perceived to be the highest in the world for the fourth successive year from 2001. This does not, however, justify that Bangladesh is the "most corrupt country" or "most corrupt nation." To say so represents misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the CPI. While corruption is indeed the most formidable challenge

The Berlin-based Transparency International publishes the annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which provides an international ranking of countries in terms of perceived prevalence of corruption. Bangladesh has been ranked at the bottom of the ranking for the fourth successive year (2001-2004). The CPI 2005 is going to be released today (October 18). The following are intended to facilitate clearer understanding of the index and its implications.

against governance, development, and poverty reduction in Bangladesh, the vast majority of the people are only victims of corruption. Corruption by a limited number of powerful individuals and the failure of leadership and institutions to control and prevent corruption cannot justify suggestions that the country or nation or the people are most corrupt.

**What is Transparency International Bangladesh's (TIB) role in CPI?**

TIB has no role in CPI. TI secretariat in Berlin prepares this ranking. TIB, like any other national chapter of TI, is not involved nor does it provide any information that goes into the index. While TIB has its own anti-corruption research, advocacy, and citizens' participation programs in Bangladesh, as the national chapter of TI in Bangladesh, TIB's responsibility as far as CPI goes, is no more than facilitating its release when the report is available.

**Is TIB responsible for any embarrassment caused to Bangladesh in terms of CPI?**

No, nor can TI or the other institution(s) whose information are used in CPI ranking, be held responsible for the embarrassment. Those who are involved in corruption are responsible and hence should be held accountable, not those who are reporting or researching on it.

**For the purpose of the CPI, how is corruption defined?**

The CPI defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. The surveys used in compiling the CPI ask questions that relate to the misuse of public power for private benefit, with a focus, for example, on bribe-taking by public officials in public procurement. The sources do not distinguish between administrative and political corruption or between petty and grand corruption.

**Why is the CPI based only on perceptions?**

It is difficult to base comparative statements on the levels of corruption in different countries on hard empirical data, e.g., by comparing the number of prosecutions or court cases. Such cross-country data does not reflect levels of corruption; rather it highlights the quality of prosecutors, courts and/or the media in exposing corruption. The only available method so far of compiling data for international comparison is therefore to build on the experience and perceptions of those who are confronted with corruption in a country.

**What are the sources of data for the CPI?**

The CPI draws on about 16 different polls and surveys conducted by about 10 independent institutions. To qualify, the survey work must be performed with complete integrity, and the data has to be of the highest quality, well documented, and sufficient to permit a judgement

on its reliability. Since fundamental changes in the levels of corruption in a country evolve only slowly, CPI is based on a three-year rolling average. For instance, CPI 2005 will be based on surveys provided between 2003 and 2005.

The institutions include: Columbia University, Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House, Information International, International Institute for Management Development, a multilateral development bank, Merchant International Group, Political and Economic Risk Consultancy, Transparency International Gallup International, World Bank/European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, World Economic Forum, and World Markets Research Centre.

**What are the sources of data specific to Bangladesh?**

In case of Bangladesh, sources of data for the latest CPI are seven surveys conducted by five organisations: Economist Intelligence Unit, Columbia University, World Economic Forum, the Merchants International Group, and World Markets Research Centre.

**Whose opinion is polled by these surveys?**

Surveys are carried out among businesspeople, country analysts, and residents of countries. It is important to note that residents' viewpoints are found to correlate

well with those of experts from abroad. The CPI gathers perceptions that are broadly based, not biased by cultural preconditions, and not only generated by US and European experts.

**How is the index computed?**

The CPI methodology is regularly reviewed by a steering committee consisting of leading international experts in the fields of corruption, econometrics and statistics. The statistical work on the CPI is coordinated at the University of Passau, Germany.

**What are other relevant indexes or tools?**

TI also publishes the Global Corruption Barometer, which is concerned with attitudes toward and experiences of corruption among the general public. Over time, the Global Corruption Barometer, which was first published in 2003, will provide an indicator of the impact of the fight against corruption within countries.

In addition, TI's Bribe Payers Index focuses on the propensity of firms in leading export countries to bribe abroad -- creating the 'supply side' of corruption. The BPI underlines the point that corruption in international business transactions involves those who give as well as those who take, and the BPI is therefore a complement to the CPI. **Further information on CPI and related issues can be obtained from TI website [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)**

About TIB

TIB is an independent, non-government, non-partisan, and non-profit organisation with a vision of Bangladesh in which government, politics, business, civil society, and the daily lives of the people shall be free from corruption. More in [www.ti-bangladesh.org](http://www.ti-bangladesh.org)

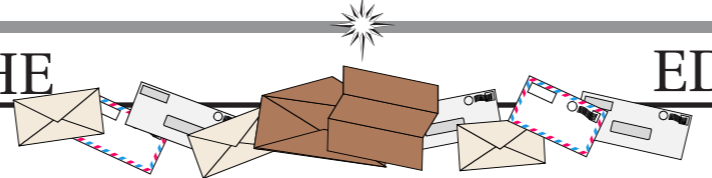
As TI's accredited national chapter in Bangladesh, TIB partners and cooperates with TI and its chapters worldwide. However, TIB is fully independent in terms of its strategies, policies and programs for anti-corruption movement in Bangladesh. TIB also raises its own funds and receives no financial support from TI, except for specific projects undertaken from time to time jointly with other chapters.

TIB's mission, and the various activities it undertakes -- research, dissemination, campaign and advocacy -- are geared to catalyse a participatory social movement for strengthening institutions, laws and practices for combating corruption in Bangladesh and establishing an efficient and transparent system of governance, politics and business.

TIB works against corruption, not against the government of the day, nor any particular department thereof. TIB has no mandate or capacity to investigate or take action against individual cases or allegations of corruption -- big or small. TIB is a co-stakeholder and a source of support to all anti-corruption initiatives, including those by the government.

Dr. Iftakharuzzaman is Executive Director, TIB

## 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.

### MRCP exam centre--some questions

The roundtable discussion, entitled "Introducing higher medical degrees (MRCP/MRCS/MRCOG & MFDS) and Professional Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) examination center under the Royal College of the UK" was a thought provoking one, but I have some doubts about the idea.

Firstly, the FCPS degree offered by the BCPS has tremendous reputation. Most of our medical college teachers have obtained this degree. They are skilled professionals. They are serving the patients well. There should not be any doubt about the competence of the FCPS degree holders. So why do we need MRCP exam centre when we have BCPS at home?

Secondly, there is an acute shortage of doctors in our country. They have a bright future at home. Moreover, they do not have any unemployment problem. So why do they think of leaving Bangladesh?

Thirdly, the number of doctors

having postgraduate qualification is very small. They can earn crores of taka every year through private practice, commissions from diagnostic centres, pharmaceutical companies etc. Why do they need to compete in global job market when they enjoy such a position here?

I am not sure about the logic behind the idea of establishing an MRCP exam centre in Bangladesh. I hope that the organisers and the doctors will answer my questions through this newspaper, with relevant facts and figures in order to justify their demand. Then all the confusion regarding this idea will be removed.

Hossain Masud  
Mirtur, Dhaka

### Prospect of IT

Bangladesh has recently signed a contract for the establishment and connection of Submarine Cable known as the high way of IT to be attached to a consortium of Singapore. It has entered into the information highway by this contract.

Attachment with the Submarine Cable Network is wholly consistent with the demand of the age in the present situation of Bangladesh. Because of joining with the Submarine Cable, a lot of development will take place in the field of IT and communication of Bangladesh and it will have an access to E-commerce.

E-commerce (Electronic commerce) has created a sensation worldwide in the age of IT. E-commerce is going on in many parts of the world. Customers can purchase their desired commodities online, sitting at home with the help of Internet.

Being a developing country, Bangladesh badly needs to participate in E-commerce that means IT. It is a fact that she has a very bright prospect for development and export of IT. Realising this prospect, the government has already announced IT as a thrust sector.

The prospect of IT in Bangladesh is increasing day by day. A great number

of educated people are receiving IT based education and training and a large number of highly educated persons are working for the growth of IT industry in Bangladesh. Many prominent industrialists have come forward for making investment in IT industry and some foreign IT based institutions have opened their sales offices and training centres in Bangladesh. So it can be said that the prospect of IT industry in Bangladesh is bright.

The developed countries of the world are using IT in almost every sector and going ahead day by day, but the use and the prospect of IT in Bangladesh still lags far behind in comparison with that.

In the developed countries, computer and Internet are used in the official functions. The development of IT depends much on the extensive use of computer. But in the offices of Bangladesh, computer is used as a type machine and Internet is used very limitedly.

In the developed countries, the demand of computer science or engineering degree holders is great. They are not to stay unemployed. But in Bangladesh although there are many institutions based on IT, they are still unemployed in the absence of a sufficient number of IT based farms. As a result, they cannot apply their acquired knowledge. This is a major impediment for the advancement of IT in Bangladesh.

In the light of the points mentioned above, it can be said that a country, which is rich in IT, is rich in economic sphere too. Discrimination between the oriental world and the occidental world can be overcome with IT. In a poor country like Bangladesh, poverty can be alleviated only by appropriate use of the knowledge of IT. In spite of some drawbacks, Bangladesh is trying to compete with the developed countries of the world with IT. It is going to be the driving force of our economic development.

Abu Monsur Mohammed Goni  
Department of English

### University of Chittagong Harassment of Jibon Bima pension holders

I would like to bring to your attention that the Jibon Bima Corporation is harassing its pension policyholders. In their pension policy it has guaranteed that a pension holder or his/her nominee is supposed to get the promised amount of pension every month on its maturity after ten years, even in the event of death of the pension holder. However, on maturity of my pension policy, the dealing assistant asked me to appear at their office every month to collect the pension. This remark of his is a clear violation of the Pension Act 1938.

I would like to take this opportunity to bring the matter to the notice of the authorities of Jibon Bima Corporation. Please don't harass pension holders unnecessarily. Make arrangements to have the pensions of policyholders to be paid every month directly into their bank accounts.  
Dr. Abdul Hye Nizam  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

### Nazrul Institute promoting culture of commerce?

There was a time when I felt proud to be a neighbour of the Nazrul Institute, popularly known as the Kabi Bhaban in Dhanmandi, the landmark building where poet Nazrul Islam passed the last days of his life before his death. But no more. The Institute has since suffered shocking decline and degeneration. As the Nazrul Institute's three large billboards across roads 11 & 15 loudly indicate, its 'auditorium is for hire' -- an open ended all purpose invitation. The Institute apparently has now descended to become an income generating concern to promote a culture of commerce blurring its original objective to promote the culture of Nazrul Research.

What is outrageous and unconscionable is that the Nazrul Institute administration is now renting out its auditorium to teen age boys and girls for performance of high pitched pop, rock and disco band music accompa-

nied by an orgy of full blast, boisterous and deafening drum beatings, on week days, even during office hours for rehearsal -- completely impervious to disturbance to Institute's office work, peace of the departed soul of the poet and calm and tranquility of the immediate neighbourhood.

I draw the attention of the Cultural Affairs Ministry to intervene, investigate and stop forthwith this practice which defiles the sanctity of the Institute and taints its reputation, desecrates the honour and memory of the poet and savors of bad taste and ill judgment. If the Institute at all is in dire need to raise funds for its sustenance, it could rent out its auditorium sparingly and selectively on weekends only to cultural organisations dedicated to the promotion of Nazrul, Tagore and other modern songs and classical and folk music.

I am writing this letter with no malice but out of deep regard and reverence for the rebel poet.  
Abdul Hannan, Dhanmandi