

Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation Forum 2005 Inaugural Address by  
**H. E. Begum Khaleda Zia**, Prime Minister, People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Dhaka, Tuesday, 15 November 2005

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**Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim**

Honourable Colleagues,  
Distinguished Vice-President of the World Bank,  
Representatives of Development Partners,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Assalamu Alaikum.**

I am pleased to welcome you all to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation Forum 2005. I am very happy to see the representatives of our development partners at this forum. The forum provides a good opportunity for sharing with our development partners our successes and challenges, development agenda, strategies and goals, as well as issues of common concern. I extend my greetings and best wishes to everybody present at this august gathering.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to reaffirm here our commitment to establish an accountable government. We have already undertaken various reforms for improving governance, law and order and investment climate in the country. We have been making relentless efforts to accelerate socio-economic growth and substantially reduce the proportion of people living below the poverty-line. Around fifty-four percent of our current year's revenue and development budget is being spent for financing direct and indirect poverty reduction programmes. We are striving to link capacity-building through human resource development, micro-credit programmes for income and employment generation, disaster management through risk-reduction, social justice and fair-play with our efforts for poverty alleviation within national, regional and global frameworks. This multi-dimensional approach seeks to put the poor at the forefront of our perennial battle against poverty.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our government has all along attached the topmost priority to poverty alleviation. We have already approved the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) through broad-based participatory consultations with various stakeholders. Our PRSP is a home-grown country-led unique document which will from now on be the guiding principle for our future growth. We acknowledge the advice and suggestions of all concerned including our development partners in the formulation process of this PRSP.

We are committed to implementing the reform strategies set out in this paper. Our government had earlier prepared an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and pursued development activities in

its light. In the meantime, significant progress has been made in the social sector – particularly in the fields of health, education and social welfare. By now, Bangladesh has achieved one of the highest primary school enrolment rates in the developing world. It has also achieved gender parity in enrolment at the primary and lower secondary levels in line with the millennium development goals (MDGs). According to the World Economic Forum, we have performed best among the countries of South Asia in reducing gender disparity. Infant mortality rate has also been reduced substantially in the country and our immunization rates are better than these of most developing countries. Rural women in Bangladesh have been significantly empowered through different measures including micro-credit programmes. We have made good progress in protecting women's and children's rights. Steps are now underway for creating the office of an Independent Children's Commissioner in order to cater to the interests of children.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have also taken numerous measures to improve the law and order situation in the country. A special cell has been established in the Ministry of Home Affairs to monitor the progress of sensational criminal cases. Such monitoring cells are also working in all districts of the country headed by the concerned Deputy Commissioners.

The enactment of Speedy Trial Act and the constitution of Speedy Trial Tribunals have resulted in swift disposal of a good number of heinous criminal cases. These measures have brought about noticeable improvements in the country's criminal justice delivery system. The government has also been attaching priority to curbing corruption. The Independent Anti-Corruption Commission has been set up following the passage of a bill for the purpose in parliament. The Commission has now been vested with adequate financial, administrative and legal authority to discharge its responsibilities independently. After some initial teething problem, it has now become fully operational.

We have instituted a Rapid Action Battalion in the police force through enactment of a law in the Parliament with a view to curbing crimes expeditiously. The Battalion has gone into full-scale operation and its positive influence on the overall law and order situation is quite evident by now.

**Distinguished Guests,**

Numerous measures have been taken by our government during the last few years for promoting good governance, bringing about financial discipline and ensuring accountability. Attempts have been made to rationalise the size of government organisations and agencies, which included mergers, liquidations, closures and partial closures of state-owned enterprises. We have introduced merit-based promotion and professional career planning to make the civil service more efficient and result-oriented. We are also implementing programmes for capacity enhancement of government officials through higher education and skill development training at both home and abroad.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We have faced many challenges in the economic front during the last four years. However, we have succeeded in instilling macro-economic stability by removing a serious imbalance that we inherited

back in 2001. We have successfully streamlined monetary and exchange rate management and taken measures to improve bank supervision. We have also formulated an integrated a policy framework for facing the post-MFA challenges since January 2005. Our pro-poor growth strategies have been directed towards generating more jobs for the poorer sections of the population, expansion of social safety-net and addressing the unique problems of poverty-prone areas and regions. We can realistically expect that our real GDP would continue to grow substantially in the coming years in the backdrop of an impressive export-recovery, swift agricultural and industrial growth and a moderately low inflation rate.

**Distinguished Guests,**

We recognise and appreciate the role of our vibrant civil society and the innovative NGOs in our development process. Many of our success-stories in the areas of health, education, micro-credit, women's empowerment and social welfare are the outcomes of Government-NGO collaboration and cooperation. The NGOs in Bangladesh enjoy adequate operational freedom for carrying out their mandated activities. We are committed to maintaining an enabling environment for them so that they can be effective partners in all our development endeavours.

Development of the private sector has been one of the cornerstones of our economic policy. Our government has undertaken a number of measures to create a conducive environment where the private sector can play its due role. Bangladesh has been offering wide-ranging facilities and incentives to private sector entrepreneurs, particularly foreign investors. We have been consistently liberalising our investment policies and offering highly attractive incentive packages for facilitating foreign direct investments. Rules, regulations and documentation procedures for doing business here have been considerably simplified so that investors feel encouraged to invest in Bangladesh. Some of the recent surveys indicate that we have one of the most business-friendly environments in South Asia.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Despite significant achievements in the field of socio-economic growth during the past four years, we still have a long way to go. Although there have been a decrease by 4 percent of our population living below the poverty-line since we assumed office in 2001, around 40 percent still live below that line. Against this backdrop, we need continued support of our development partners to sustain and carry forward our poverty reduction efforts and achieve the millennium development goals for the year 2015, as set by the United Nations. I hope, this year's Forum will contribute significantly to a better facilitation of our development initiatives and help forge greater understanding with our development partners on the questions of poverty alleviation and socio-economic growth.

I thank you all for your presence and wish this PRS Implementation Forum 2005 all success.

Allah Hafez  
Bangladesh Zindabad

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