

## 27th BCS viva voce cancellation

*An unavoidable step, but now reform of  
the PSC must follow*

**B**Y deciding to cancel the results of the viva voce of the 27th Bangladesh Civil Service examinations, the caretaker government has certainly acknowledged public sensitivities on the issue. In these last few months, a very large number of questions have arisen about the conduct of the examinations, with many pointing to the favouritism and political considerations allegedly involved in the success of the examinees. To be sure, there are the candidates who have qualified in a genuine manner. But their success too has unfortunately been overshadowed by all the allegations made about the other candidates around them. When reports suggest that candidates obtaining 45 per cent marks in the written examinations suddenly attain 95 per cent at the viva voce, there are grounds for very real concern about the quality of a selection process that is supposed to choose good, efficient civil servants for the future.

We are, therefore, happy to note that the administration has begun to demonstrate its seriousness about handling the uncomfortable questions which have sprung up around the 27th BCS examinations. The move to cancel the viva voce, from that perspective, is a step toward redressing a major grievance. There are of course a number of other irregularities relating to the examinations which ideally should be dealt with by the PSC. For the moment, though, an important lesson drawn from the viva voce issue is that the commission has truly gone through a steep decline in quality, which quality needs to be brought back. Indeed, there is an integrity question which arises here. The individuals who manned the PSC till the arrival of Saadat Hussain (and all of them except their chairperson are still there) clearly did a poor job of it. It is for the new chairman now to set the right tenor at the PSC through the clearly hands-on leadership he has been demonstrating since taking charge. That obviously calls for the creation of a right, purposeful team which can take the organisation back to its moorings.

At this point, when as a nation we are all engaged in bringing decency and purposeful administration back into our institutions, the matter of a reform of the PSC assumes naturally huge significance. However, what must be borne in mind is that more than a change in personnel, it is a necessary and meaningful transformation of the process of a selection of candidates for the civil service that is crucial. An examination system that really puts candidates through tough scrutiny, with the objective of ensuring a predominance of merit in the selection process, is what we need for a dynamic, responsible civil service in the future. The time has arrived for the Public Service Commission to have its reputation as a credible organisation restored.