



BDF MEET

# Donors to press govt for more tolerance in politics

**STAR REPORT**

Donors at the upcoming Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting will press Dhaka to address the issue of political confrontation as they believe the government should be tolerant toward peaceful protest and respect freedom of thought, association and speech.

In the discussion note prepared by Local Consultative Group of the BDF, the donors have expressed their keenness on ensuring early

support for holding the national elections in 2006 under a neutral caretaker government.

They however have criticised the 14th amendment to the constitution that deals with women's reserved seats in parliament. "Any constitutional amendments should be preceded by full consultations and widespread support. This is even more pertinent given the ruling coalition's large majority in parliament."

Stressing the importance of more constructive dialogues (between the

conflicting political parties) through democratic channels, the development partners have asked the government to respect people's right to wage new political movements or float platforms, hinting at the government's intolerance toward former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury's new political platform.

The donors have also expressed concern about the government's fresh application for a further extension of the time limit for the implementation of a Supreme Court directive for separation of the judiciary from the executive and urged the government to move quickly on the issue.

The note to be discussed at the three-day meeting beginning in Dhaka on Saturday touches upon many other non-economic burning issues like corruption, law and order, institution of a Judicial Service Commission and an independent anti-corruption commission, mishandling of NGOs, investment and regulatory climate and any issues hindering Bangladesh's development.

The donors feel there is a need 'to end the tradition of opposition boycotting parliament' and to 'ensure application of rules of procedure to allow opposition to voice views and to represent citizens concerns'.

They observe improving human security is an urgent priority of the government given the regular reports of violence and insecurity. There has been a surge of politically motivated violence in the recent months, the donors noted.

"Laws and practices inconsistent with international human rights treaties signed by Bangladesh should be revoked and institutions

to promote the protection of human rights established," the note says.

The development partners expect the government to update them on the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission and appointment of an Ombudsman.

The government should guarantee the protection of rights and human security of all sections of society, including minority, ethnic and religious groups, the note says.

Decentralisation and developing local government institutions will be key to improving accountability of public service delivery and the donors are keen to see the government's detailed plan for decentralisation, it added.

The note terms the enactment of a law for forming an independent anti-corruption commission a positive step. But it says donors now welcome more details on strategy, sequencing and timing of reforms to ensure that this body becomes operational with the shortest possible delay and that it is independent and effective.