



Economic reforms drive decelerating : Saifur

Politics of confrontation blamed

STAFF REPORTER

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman believes that the politics of confrontation badly impedes the process of economic development needed to banish poverty from the country.

Addressing a dialogue on the upcoming Bangladesh Development Forum meeting, organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue in the city

yesterday, he said that unless there was an end to confrontational politics, the country would fail to accelerate the reform drive aimed at attaining a poverty-free self-reliant Bangladesh.

"Under a democratic framework, there should be a consensus on economic reform programmes between political parties. Otherwise, it is difficult to carry forward the reform initiatives. Many people asked me why we could not implement reforms like in Pakistan. But I told them that Pakistan could do that as it had autocratic rule but in a democracy where you have to honour others' opinions, it is very tough," he said.

Stressing the need for developing institutional capacity, he said that without this the private sector would not be able to be the leader of the

country's economic growth.

He felt that the perception that the country would not survive without donors' aid was totally wrong as the country had tremendous potential to be self-reliant through mobilising its domestic resources which was very low compared to the other countries of the region.

Chaired by the CPD Chairman Dr

Rehman Sobhan, the dialogue was also addressed among others by former Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, former Finance Minister M Syeduzzaman, Awami League leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury, World Bank Country Director Christine I Wallich, MCCI President Kutubuddin Ahmed, eminent journalist Ataus Samad, JSD leader Hasanul Huq Inu, advisor to BNP Chairperson MM Rezaul Karim, BCI President AK Azad, Prof Abu Ahmed, representatives of NGOs, including Dr Salahuddin Ahmed of BRAC, Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori and Sultana Kamal of Aine O Salish Kendra.

Earlier, CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattachariya made the keynote presentation.

"The citizens of the country feel disempowered to observe that he government, instead of being responsive to its citizens' concern, is more responsive to similar demands when these originate from the donors" he said.

The presentation portrayed a diminishing role of foreign aid in the country's economy as in FY81 the share of the foreign aid was 5.8 per cent of the GDP which came down to only 2.8 per cent in FY03.

The Ambassador of Germany, the Australian High Commissioner and the Danish Ambassador also spoke.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said that nobody should use the signboard of an NGO to carry on political activities.

M Syeduzzaman stressed the need for strong local government to ensure transparent utilisation of the donors' money.

Awami League leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury said that the government should not patronise any NGOs; it should not allow political activities by the NGOs.

The WB Country Director said that the present election process involved huge costs and millions of takas had to be spent to win a constituency. The entire process costs 10 per cent of the GDP. On the law and order situation he said that

the WB could emphasise on the reform of the police force at the BDF meeting.

Hasanul Huq Inu blasted the ruling party for using the police force to block the normal activities of the political parties. Ataus Samad said that the security of the individual citizen tops the agenda for the last two and half years but no progress had made in this regard.

Kutubuddin Ahmed said that law and order should be improved to attract both local and foreign investment. He urged the opposition MPs to join the budget session of Parliament.

Abu Ahmed suggested the formation of an independent regulatory commission for the NGOs to ensure transparency. He also suggested the disclosure of their balance sheet.

Dr Salahuddin Ahmed said that the head of the proposed NGO Foundation should be an independent person.

Khushi Kabir said that the deliberations of the BDF should be made public.

UNB adds: Donors are sitting here on Saturday in the BDF meet to evaluate gov-

ernment programmes to deliver on the PRSP, promote good governance, enhance partnership between the government and NGOs, and improve human development outcome and trade and investment climate.

Promoting infrastructure to support growth and development, and aid governance and implementation of development programme would also be the issues to be discussed at the Forum.

The Finance Minister rejected the criticism that the economy was dependent on the drip feeds of foreign aid as he said only 2.8 per cent of the GDP came from foreign assistance.

He said all the development activities had been tagged with the I-PRSP and the government was trying to establish good governance while reforms in the financial sector were moving fast.

Civil-society leaders identified confrontational politics, corruption and law-and-order situation as the major impediments to the economic development of the country.