



# World Bank leader's plain speaking Citizens distrust police and courts

STAFF REPORTER

The World Bank Vice-President for the South Asia Region, Praful Patel, observed yesterday that "ordinary citizens in Bangladesh do not trust the legal system - the police and the courts - to deliver fair and speedy justice."

He also expressed deep concern over politically-linked violence, criminality and growing corruption.

"Democratic processes are seen to have been undermined; for example, by the recent mass arrests and the

harsh treatment of some MPs making a peaceful attempt to set up a new party. Several recent murders of businessmen and the seeming protection of the perpetrators, have only served to heighten concerns over law and order," he added.

Stressing the need for improving law and order to ensure sound business environment, he said, "And right

here at home, ordinary citizens, your richest resource, need to be reassured as they walk in the street or sit at home with their children. Are they safe? All these perceptions and realities can only come to undermine the present economic successes".

The World Bank Vice-President observed that a farewell to the ongoing dysfunctional politics was a must

to achieve the desired economic prosperity.

Addressing the inaugural session of the BDF meeting in the city yesterday, he also listed a number of impediments to the growth of the economy.

"There are dysfunctional elements elsewhere in the system. Dysfunctional politics is a key vulnerability that many have recognized. However this is something that only Bangladeshis can fix. As a development banker I can best stand ready to  
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## 'Farewell to dysfunctional politics a must to achieve economic prosperity'

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help, when you have mapped out your path forward," he said.

"These obstacles are not new but have been endemic to the country for too long now. Hard-won economic gains and critical human development successes are now imperiled. You may be losing your competitive edge to other countries - and this will be hard to regain. In a globalised world this has a high opportunity cost. You are also risking the integrity and strength of your very institutions - successes such as the REBs, the NGOs, the new private universities; such institutional degradation is very hard to reverse. For all these reasons, your development partners are legitimately concerned and must speak plainly today," he added.

However he said that the donors recognise some substantial steps taken by this government. "The new Anti-Corruption Commission is an important beginning. As important will be guaranteeing its independence. Steps underway on judicial and police reform are another beginning. The new approach to public procurement offers the promise of transforming opportunities for corruption in contracting," he added.

The WB official also urged the government to take measures to help create

public confidence, including greater transparency in the legal-judicial system, business-friendly institutions and courts, people-friendly law and order, empowered citizens.

Both investors and the average citizen need an environment in which they feel a day-to-day sense of personal security; a predictable security that is reassuring and even-handed, he added.

Focusing on the government-NGO relationship Patel said, it is with deep concern that we and the development community are now responding to the new tensions between Government and the NGO community.

He clearly pointed out that the recent draft update to the laws governing NGOs had serious flaws in both, process and substance. "We appreciate that Government is revisiting the proposed legislation. Surely, the ambition of any revision would be to foster a strong, effective and autonomous NGO movement in Bangladesh?", he said adding that of course there should be reasonable standards, partly framed in legislation, for the internal governance and business practices of NGOs. Responsibility and public accountability needs to be a two-way street.

He also urged the government to bring the administration closer to the

people can greatly enhance public accountability and the effectiveness of public actions. "I would suggest that strengthening local government, making government more open and accountable to citizens at the local level, is an agenda for public reform that is overdue despite having support across party lines," he said.

Lauding the recent progress in the economic front, the World Bank representative said, "Over the last decade or so, Bangladesh first achieved food self-sufficiency and went further to build a strong export profile. A significant reform agenda has come together in the last two years.

We know that reform is inevitably a complex and demanding task, one in which much will be achieved incrementally, brick-by-brick.

We recognize and respect the strong economic team that is driving your performance.

Let me congratulate you specifically on macro-economic stabilization! Your recent growth at 5.5 per cent is enviable".

He said that Bangladesh shows indicators among the best in South Asia after Sri Lanka. Declines in infant and child mortality were among the fastest in the developing world.