



# Donors grill govt on law and order, assure funding for PRSP

*Govt is accountable to people, not to donors, Saifur tells BDF meeting*

**FE Report**

Pushed hard by the donors on its dismal law and order progress report, the government Sunday defended its track record saying that reforms have been undertaken to stem the rot and more are underway to make the country a better place to live.

At a session on 'good governance and human security' at the annual Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting, the government also went into an offensive saying that it would not allow any interference on its internal affairs as 'the government is accountable only to the people and the parliament, not to the donors'.

Led by the World Bank, the 32 donors pointed out the government could not escape its responsibility in sliding law and order, dysfunctional politicians, politics-criminal nexus, ineffective parliament, rampant corruption and poor legal and police administration in the country.

The donors, however, endorsed the government's bid to finalise the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) by December this year assuring that they would lend US\$2.0 billion per annum to help implement the development strategy paper.

At a session on PRSP and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) early in the

morning, the development partners emphasised that the opposition parties be involved in the consultation of PRSP and it be debated in the parliament.

They demanded specific timeframe on the separation of judiciary, immediate creation of Anti Corruption Commission, Human Rights Commission, Office of the Ombudsman, decentralisation of power.

They said that these demands and queries don't mean any interference on the country's internal affairs. "We want to know about these key issues because these internal matters have reflections on external affairs," said a representative of a key donor.

The country could have grown three per cent more than the present rate had there been a sound law and order, no corruption and a congenial investment climate in the country, Praful C Patel, the World Bank vice president told the reporters after the session.

"Stable rule of law is prerequisite for growth. The country needs 7-8 per cent growth to reduce its huge poverty," Patel said, adding that the government should improve its governance to woo more investment in the country.

Finance and Minister M Saifur Rahman and Law Minister Moudud Ahmed stood defiant saying that law and order is now a common problem across the world while the opposition is much to blame for the dysfunctional politics in the country.

"Name a place where there is no law and order problem. In America too there are murders, rapes and violence. And what's happening in Iraq?" Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, who co-chaired the session, said.

"Since we assumed power, the opposition remained absent in the parliament for 19 months out of 30. They too are to blame for the confrontational politics," Moudud said, blasting the opposition for creating an unhealthy environment in the country.

"In addition to inviting them (main opposition) to join the parliament, the government made some significant gestures for conciliation," Moudud said, noting that still the opposition continued to disrupt economic growth and democratic institutions.

Both, however, informed the development partners that a selection committee for the Anti Corruption Commission would be appointed in a day or two while steps are underway to form the Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman.

To a query on the donors' observation on criminalisation of politics, Moudud said crime and politics are intertwined as it was proved in the past two days incidents in Tongi. "The torching of train, hundreds of vehicles testifies that."

The law minister who presented the keynote paper in the session said: law and order remains a problem owing mostly to lack of institutional support for police.

"We need money to build a modern police, who alone can improve the law and order scenario in a civilised country. We sought support from the donors for training the police. The response was very positive," Moudud told the reporters, adding already Rapid Action Battalion has been formed.

The minister added: "In New York there are 52,000 policemen for a city while there are 114,000 policemen for Bangladesh, whose population is almost ten times bigger than NY. We have one police-

man for a 1300 people while India it is one for 728 people."

He told the donors that government had planned to appoint 19,000 more policemen, restructure police manpower in thanas on need-based standards and a package of reforms was underway to improve the efficiency of 'the vitally important institution.'

Admitting that corruption is a serious hindrance to good governance in the country, Moudud said an Independent Anti Corruption Commission (IACC) is now a matter of time but an amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1958 would be required to fully make it operational.

Referring to the reforms in the criminal justice system, Moudud said that Speedy Trial Courts, Speedy Trial Tribunals, Monitoring Cell on Sensational Criminal Cases, Independent Investigative Unit and amendment to the Section 35A of the Code of Criminal Procedures were the key achievements of the government the past couple of years.

On decentralisation of power the minister said no member of parliament irrespective of the party affiliation want Upazila system in the country.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a representative of key donor said that the government functionaries looked tense in answering the queries of the donors.

The representative said the donors were keen to know what the framework of the Independent Anti Corruption Commission would be in place. There also was demand for a timeframe for the separation of judiciary.

"The main reason for raising these issues to improve investment climate in the country. It is essential for poverty reduction," the representative told the FE.