



# Govt defends NGO stand against donors' censure

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The government yesterday defended its position on non-governmental organisations at the Bangladesh Development Forum meeting, saying some of them were indulging in politics with specific agenda and corruption after donors expressed concern about recent actions against them.

Without naming Proshika, a key policymaker said actions would be taken against the NGOs involved in activities they should not do.

"We don't want the NGOs to be involved in politics. We don't want to use them in our politics and we don't like that other parties will use them in their political interest," Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, local government, rural development and cooperatives minister, told reporters after the third session on 'Enhancing Partnerships between Government and NGOs.'

About 2,000 NGOs are working in Bangladesh with funds from foreign countries and investigations have been opened against only five or six of them, he added.

"Otherwise, we have good relations with the NGOs," he said.

Praful C Patel, vice-president of the World Bank's South Asia region, said the donors wanted the government to expedite the law making process on foreign finance for NGOs.

John A Roome, operations director for World Bank's South Asia region, said everybody knew that NGOs played very constructive roles in Bangladesh.

Donors are concerned about some of the legislation in the process of formulation, he added.

The donors said NGOs should be given reasonable freedom to operate without political influence and bureaucratic control.

Interactions between the government and the NGOs should take place using transparent and predictable processes including the principles of 'innocent until proven guilty', a level playing field and timely processing of payment for services and approval of donor fund release.

"Unfortunately this has not

always been the case," one of them said.

They recommended recognition of diverse roles of NGOs and a guarantee that they would enjoy legal and functional space to fulfill them.

The development partners appreciated sharing of the draft NGO bill with donors and the opportunity to provide comments.

They, however, said the consultation process to date was not adequate and serious concerns were expressed by NGOs and development partners that the proposed amendment could leave serious implications on donor funding and implementation of poverty reduction programmes.

Undertaking such consultation need not be complex or costly, they said, adding it was a matter of distributing materials and calling meetings.

Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed said major components of good governance like participation, transparency and accountability were not always found with some NGOs.

"So, the government is trying to ensure good governance in their activities," he added.