



Donors unhappy over REB's slow pace of development

SHAHNAJ BEGUM

Donors at the Bangladesh Development Forum meeting here yesterday expressed their dissatisfaction over the slow pace of development of the Rural Electrification Board (REB) and urged the government to keep the organisation out of political influence.

They said if REB's present pace of development continues then the government would not be able to fulfil its target to provide electricity to every area of the country by 2020.

Sources said because of the slow pace the REB could not implement 87 per cent of the programmes incorporated in the master plan during the last 22 years. Only a few influential members of parliament have managed to get new lines and power connections in their constituencies.

Sources said when State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmood spoke some good words about the REB, one of

the donors stopped him and said, "the star is losing its shine."

On the concluding day yesterday the meeting of Bangladesh Development Forum 2004, the donors did not ask any question about the gas export issue. Sources said they put two specific energy and power related questions. In what manner will the private sector take part in the country's energy sector? 'When will the shares of DESCO and the bonds of PGCB be offloaded?'

The meeting discussed other issues, like power, energy, inland water transport and shipping, telecommunication and rural infrastructure.

Despite some critical comments on REB, the donors expressed their full satisfaction over the on-going development and reform activities in the power sector, sources said. However, the minister sought support from the donors side to implement the future development plans of the power sector. The power sector needs US\$ 15.1 billion to implement some of the projects in the distribution, transmission and generation sides, it was said.

Sources said the donors wanted to know of the government when the chairman of ERC (energy regulatory commission) would be appointed. The State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain told the meeting that ERC has been put into operation on 30th April and the chairman of the commission would be appointed as soon as possible.

He sought US\$ 1.2 billion for implementing some of its priority projects now and US\$ 3 billion by 2020.

In the session titled 'Providing the infrastructure to support growth and development,' the donors also discussed the development in these sectors and the reform steps taken by the government.

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmood told newsmen that the donors had expressed their satisfaction over the overall activities of the power sector, especially the on-going reform work.

Mosharraf Hossain also told newsmen that the donor agencies had expressed their satisfaction over the performance of the energy sector.

He said the government had pledged some additional measures for re-structuring the energy sector.