



UNIC Dhaka News Clipping Service

Daily Star

Page: *Editorial*

Date: *11 May - 2004*

Saifur's swipe at donors

But the questions raised remain valid

WE are in general agreement with the finance minister that elected governments should not take orders from donor nations or anyone else. We, however, do not share his confidence that a government that has been so exclusionary in its dealings, sidelining the opposition and marginalising civil society and the media, can justifiably use this as a line of defense.

The finance minister's comments to the media during the second day of the annual Bangladesh Development Forum meeting unfortunately suffered from the government's now familiar reliance on two convenient tools of defense. First, the minister blamed the media for the country's image problem, and, second, he defended the government by drawing laughable and irrelevant comparisons between Bangladesh and other countries. The suffering of the people is real, and facile comparisons to New York or some other city are meaningless and unhelpful.

The bigger point is not whether it is the place of our development partners to raise questions about the state of the nation, but whether the concerns they have raised are valid or not.

The fact is that what they have said reflects what we in the independent media have been saying for the last several years. It is true that law and order has plummeted and that corruption is institutionalised and endemic. These facts remain true whoever brings them up. Raising these issues may hurt Bangladesh's pride, but the existence of the many problems that continue to bedevil us are far more injurious to us than the embarrassment of exposure.

Indeed some of the donor critiques were simply pointing out that the government has failed to live up to its own election pledges to separate the judiciary from the executive and to form a human rights commission. What can be the harm in reminding the government of its responsibilities to its own people?

Furthermore, when the government has made pledges to the donors to institute reforms and has dragged its foot on these, do they not have a right to mention this? The finance minister's suggestion to the media that multilateral donors should only support member countries and not issue any criticism of their policies makes little sense. A side question, would he have found these remarks as offensive if his party was in the opposition? In all likelihood he would have praised them for being so forthright.