



# Some donors may quit if security doesn't improve

AFF, Dhaka

Some donors may withdraw from Bangladesh if law and order does not improve, a World Bank official said yesterday.

Speaking at the end of a three-day meeting of Bangladesh's donors, World Bank vice-president for South Asia Praful Patel urged the government to redouble efforts to improve security for ordinary citizens.

"Some donor partners who are out there doing programmes on the ground may withdraw if the (security) situation in the areas where they are working becomes worse," Patel said.

Patel added, however, that the World Bank and the majority of donors would remain in the country working towards poverty eradication.

"There is no scenario for stopping what we are doing ... but if the situation improves the country can expect to get much more donor support," he said.

Representatives from 32 donor countries and agencies took part in the annual Bangladesh Development Forum in Dhaka.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia told the donors yesterday her government was working hard to tackle many law and order problems, which she blamed on the previous government.

She listed some of the initiatives taken as fast-track courts, rapid reaction police units and monitoring of serious crime cases by a central government cell.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: Development partners yesterday called for a national consensus in the key areas of politics and governance as the government said the factors presented key barriers to faster growth in future.

The donors also called upon the political leaders to resolve the root causes that contributed to confrontational politics at a press briefing at Sonargaon Hotel.

"The road to Bangladesh's economic progress will be really bumpy if we continue the politics of confrontation," Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman said.

Patel said Bangladesh's growth and service delivery successes could not be sustained without resolution of the root causes of confrontational politics.

"Many of us expressed concern that Bangladesh's dysfunctional politics may be an even sharper constraint. We urged the government to build a national consensus on the reforms most critical to poverty reduction. Our message of national consensus is a message equally targeted to the opposition," he added.

"We should not get involved in internal issues here. But the issues came up in the discussion like improving governance, law and order and infrastructure need to be addressed. Bangladesh's economy can grow six or seven or eight percent but these are the key factors for which

the country is not getting desired progress," he told the briefing.

"We stand by the government to provide a strong support for implementing the PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) programme to alleviate poverty. I was assured that different issues including security of the citizens would be looked into. No additional support will be extended if nothing is improved."

"Before the BDF meeting, an invitation to the opposition political leader was sent for a pre-consultative meeting, but we did not get any confirmation. The role of both the ruling party and the opposition political party is important. We hope all political parties will play a constructive role," he added.

On the government-NGO relations, he said in response to comments of civil society and donors, the government was re-looking into a bill that would oversee the relations.

Saifur, also a co-chair of the BDF, said: "If we don't have the confrontational politics and can internally mobilise resources, we won't have to depend on donors so much."

The donors would have got a different perception if the government and opposition party had discussed the BDF issues, he said.

There is no basic difference between the ruling party and the opposition about reforms in different areas. But it is unfortunate that when they are not in power they think nobody has the rights to be in office, Saifur said.

"We cannot reap the harvest of our economic potentials because of our political instability and law and order," he added.