



In donors' eyes

It is no secret that the donor agencies have been exerting pressure on the government about the way the economy should be run. Although most of the times the pressure has been covert, this time it is quite explicit, as seen at the Bangladesh Development Forum meet and the press conference that followed. And this time their stand is also more understandable because they are not only pressing for raising tariffs and lowering import duties but have linked their aid to the question of governance which, indeed, is at a low ebb in the country. The donors have tagged improvement of governance, political stability and law and order among others, with the disbursement of an additional support of 2 billion US dollars. As Praful Patel, World Bank Vice President for South Asia, said, donors are ready to provide the additional support if the factors that impede growth are resolved satisfactorily. If the situation does not improve, the World Bank would not provide the additional support and the bilateral donors working for the development of the country would also withdraw their support. The poverty reduction programme would however continue.

Every citizen feels that the deteriorating law and order and loss of governance coupled with pervasive corruption are leading the country to nowhere. It is not possible to visualise any bright economic future for the country in this situation. It must be realised that the donors are stakeholders in the country's economy and so the bitter comments that they make about the overall situation in the country may be unpalatable for us but are no less valid. We have always urged in these columns that both the leading political parties may be responsible for making parliament dysfunctional but responsibility for activating the supreme legislative body lies more with the ruling party. Crimes are increasing because as soon as a crime is committed the government blames the Opposition party for it, foreclosing any impartial investigation. The same thing happened with regard to the biggest arms haul in Chittagong recently. It does not seem that the government is sincere in investigating a case. That way crimes can only proliferate.

In the recent case of Ahsanulla Master's assassination the government hastily issued a press note to the effect that it was a result of Awami League's internal feud. No one was convinced and in this instance the donors were quite explicit. The World Bank said that they are taken aback by the government statement regarding the murder. If the government sincerely wants to improve things, its whole approach to the issue of law and order -- and more broadly speaking, governance -- must undergo a change.