

Government has to
answer to donors



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The upcoming annual meeting of the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF, 2004) in Dhaka will see the Bangladesh Government face many tough questions from its economic donors regarding the implementation of pledges made during the last meet. Most of the questions concern the economic reforms as prescribed by the donors, but the government is expected to face queries as to the current political scenario of the country, especially its efforts to bring back the mainstream opposition party back to the parliament.

The meeting is also expected to discuss the country's prevailing business climate, and numerous activities that hamper the growth of business and investment opportunities in Bangladesh. The meeting, scheduled to be held in Dhaka from May 8 – 10 this year, is to be hosted by the Ministry of Finance and Planning of the Bangladesh Government, and the World Bank will act as the co-ordinating agency of the donors. Prior to the meet, the donor agencies will call on the Finance Minister on April 13 to discuss the overall economic condition and the pace of the reforms that are being taken by the government. Specific topics to be tabled at the meet include:

implementation of the policies outlined in the PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper); co-ordination programmes of the second phase of World Bank development assistance loans; and the implementation of last year's meet.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to inaugurate the three-day meet and will be attended by the World Bank Vice President for South Asia, and the Finance and Planning Minister Janab M Saifur Rahman. The meet will consist of seven sessions in which the topics to be discussed are: good

governance, increased participation by the government and NGOs, human resource development, development of the economic and investment climate, development of different infrastructure, and implementation of the development activities of the government. Senior World Bank officials have commented that the Bangladesh government has to be more active in the development of private investment and employment opportunities, and should also take measures to increase its efficiency. The meet will also discuss burning issues like the country's unstable political environment, transparency of the government, accountability of the government to the legislature, local government issues, activities of the anti-corruption commission, salary structure of government employees, promotion of government officials according to merit, reform of the police service, separation of the judiciary from the executive, appointment of an ombudsman, overseas investment, bonded warehouse regulations, and other important issues. The government may also face difficult questions from the donors with regard to the NGOs, and a separate session has been earmarked for that purpose.

Overall, this meet is going to be a tough challenge for the government, according to most analysts. It is increasingly becoming evident that apart from economic issues, non-economic issues are also high on the meet's agenda. Facts behind the Situation It is being observed last few years that Bangladesh government is always being pressured by the donors for implication of law and order, good governance, human rights, and Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper. It is no doubt that these are also burning questions which are supposed to be solved at the parliament. It proves that

our parliament is not functioning properly to solve this issue. However the government must answer to these issues not only in front of the donor but also to the public as a whole.

The Issuesa. Current political conflict resolution: At this moment there is a political conflict going on throughout the country. This political conflict deteriorates the law and order of the country. The government must be liable for not being able to tackle the situation. b.

Bringing opposition to parliament: The main opposition party of the country is out of the parliament for a long time. The government could not initiate any fruitful policy for bringing them into the parliament. c. Opposition strike (Hartal) and government reaction: Being the most undesirable thing, hartal is being used as a weapon for opposition party for a long time.

It was possible for the government to come up with a law protesting hartal by any party in the future. d. Good governance: Establishing good governance is a major issue of the donors for a long time. They want to ensure that their money is being utilized at the right place. e.

Human development: Human development refers to the development of overall poverty level and living standard of people. It is the ultimate goal of any government and donors. f. Improving the situation of trade and investment: Investors seek a risk-free environment for investment.

The present unstable situation does not confirm an investor to recover his return. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure such environment.

g. Government accountability to public and parliament: Government

accountability refers to the constraints placed on the behavior of public officials by organizations and constituencies with the power to apply sanctions on them. The government is accountable to public which must reflect such in the parliament.

h. Strengthening local government: Among the governmental departments, only the local government has the option to access to the grass root level. Donors always question the local government for the distribution of funds at the end beneficiaries. i.

Anti Corruption Legislation: While a well-functioning, competent and clean judiciary is key in upholding the rule of law on a day-to-day basis, anti-corruption laws turn out to be an effective means prosecute of an anti-corruption strategy. Legislation supporting the transition towards a corruption free society includes a freedom of information law, whereby citizens can demand the disclosure of information regarding government activities; a whistle-blower protection law in order to encourage the reporting of corruption cases; conflict of interest law, procurement laws and party financing laws. j. Asset declaration of government related personnel: Declaration of asset by the government official is a step towards reducing corruption that is suggested by the donors.

k. Public secrecy and transparency: Transparency via public scrutiny has proven to be one of the most powerful forms of monitoring public officials. Such transparency can be fostered by a number of measures, including: opening sessions of the parliament, government, and the courts to the public; registering lobbying activities; and publishing the voting records of

parliamentarians, annual reports of government bodies, trial records, and the decisions of judges. l.

Separating legislation department: Government has always an influence on judiciary body as the legislation department is not separated from the government. m. Human rights commission: To ensure the human right the government is suggested by the donors to establish a human rights commission. The government is going to be asked about the advancement they made in establishing the commission. n.

Ombudsman: Employing an ombudsman was a major commitment of the government. The government will be asked about the progress they made in this regard. o. Use of donor fund: The government is accountable for the use of donor fund.

Donors will question the government on this issue. p. Privatization: There are many state owned companies which are running loss for a long time. A major reason behind their loss is corrupted management. Donors have suggested privatizing these companies in order to improve the management and operation.

q. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): FDI acts as a measure of countries overall investment situation and the economy. An increasing FDI shows an improved economy of the country. Finally it must be noted that our government can bargain with the donors for the market access to their countries instead seeking fund from them. A market access to the world will boost the economy as well as create more employment.