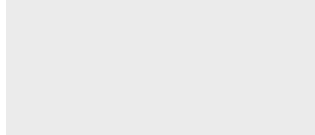




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Discuss best ways to develop Bangladesh

EU-German delegates ask govt, opposition



Dirk Niebel

Diplomatic Correspondent

European Union and Germany representatives yesterday said the government and opposition should discuss the best ways for development of Bangladesh as it has all chances to become a middle income economy by 2021.

This view was expressed by German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Dirk Niebel, and EU Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs during a press conference at Sonargaon Hotel last evening.

The two arrived here yesterday on a four-day visit in a joint mission.

On the first day of their trip, they called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Finance Minister AMA Muhith and State Minister for Environment and Forest Hasan Mahmud.

The delegates also met representatives of the civil society at the hotel.

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They will hold talks with Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia on June 23 and address another press conference.

None of them gave any direct answer when asked about the current political controversy over the Caretaker government system, but said it is better for the politicians to work together for the people.

On current political situation, the German minister said "Despite problems, Bangladesh is a stable country in the region comparing with Pakistan and Afghanistan and the country has all chances to achieve the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] by 2015 and emerge as a middle income economy by 2021."

"You can't stay at home and say no," said Niebel in an oblique reference to the main opposition, which is now boycotting parliament session.

On another question, the he said corruption is a major obstacle to development, fighting against poverty and overseas investment.

They praised the role of the civil society for development of a country and said in democracy there should be a space for expressing different views. A country could develop using the experience of the members of the civil society.

The German minister said the civil society in Bangladesh had expected more from the new government but it failed to deliver.

Niebel said "Bangladesh is internationally renowned for its vibrant NGO scene. In our meeting with civil society we discussed progress and challenges in the development of the country."

On talks with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, German Minister Niebel said he was impressed by the successes of Bangladesh in the past years while poverty and child mortality rates declined. And, economic growth of 6.7 percent is remarkable.

"Bangladesh is a very dynamic country and I am deeply impressed by the successes it achieved in the past years. Through my visit, I would like to encourage partners to invest in good governance to realise the huge development potential of the country," he said.

"I promise our Bangladeshi partners the continued support of the German government."

The EU Commissioner said "The EU has been a longstanding supporter for Bangladesh as it has been achieving remarkable economic growth, a good track record for achieving the MDGs, and a reputation as a vibrant democracy."

"EU will continue its support as Bangladesh aims to become a middle income country by 2021," he added.

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