

Special Press Review on Minister Niebel's and Commissioner Piebalgs visit to Bangladesh

German minister points to social business hurdles

A German federal minister yesterday told the finance minister that their companies are facing legal barriers in spending money in social business projects in Bangladesh.

The issue was raised when a 32-member team led by Dirk Niebel, the German federal minister for economic cooperation and development, and Andris Piebalgs, the European Union commissioner for development cooperation, met Finance Minister AMA Muhith at his office at the secretariat. After the meeting, Muhith told reporters that a German private company wants to invest 30 million euros in social business projects in Bangladesh. "Our regulation stipulates that a company must go to stockmarket after a certain period. But it is a problem as social businesses cannot go to the share market," he said. The finance minister said the government was considering ways to address the issue. He said, as investment in social business has not gained much ground in Bangladesh, rules on it are yet to be formulated. The minister said, except some social investment made by microcredit pioneer Prof Muhammad Yunus, no noteworthy investment has flown into the sector.

During the meeting with the finance minister, the German minister and an owner of a German company expressed their interest to make investment in social business projects in Bangladesh. But the existing rules in Bangladesh have been standing on their way, they said. Muhith also briefed the delegation about the country's overall economic situation. He said inflation is the biggest problem the country faces now. "In coming days tackling inflation will be a very, very tough job." The German minister emphasised creating congenial environment for investment with no corruption and low bureaucracy. Niebel termed the trip a historic one as for the first time in the last 15 years an EU development commissioner and a development minister from an important member state are traveling Bangladesh together.

"This shows that Bangladesh is an important partner for us," he said. The EU commissioner said the government must step up efforts to tackle corruption, otherwise aid money would not be effective. "I have nothing special in my mind about the issue, but you need to really demonstrate strong leadership to fight corruption," said Piebalgs. He also said: "We are looking at ways to increase the attractiveness of your country for our investment." The commissioner also called for fixing energy problem to attract long-term foreign investment.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=191013>

BD is on track to achieve MDGS: Niebel

The visiting German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Mr. Dirk Niebel said Tuesday his country would continue providing assistance to Bangladesh in its efforts to become the middle income country by 2021. "Germany has been supporting Bangladesh since its independence. Bangladesh is a very dynamic developing country. I am deeply impressed by the successes it achieved in the past years. Poverty and child mortality rates have declined and economic growth has been

remarkable in the last 20 years," he told the media at a press briefing at a local hotel in the city. He has said that Bangladesh is on the right track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"You (Bangladesh) have the chance to achieve MDGs as you are the stable country in the region. Look Pakistan and Afghanistan," he said. He said that EU would continue providing financial assistance to Bangladesh in attaining the MDGs. Lauding the role of civil society in their efforts toward country's development he said, "Bangladesh is internationally renowned for its vibrant Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)". "We discussed with civil society the progress and challenges in the development of the country," he mentioned. He said Germany and the EU will provide assistance in the fields of renewable energy, education, environment, health and support improved social and environment standards in Bangladeshi industries especially in the garment sector. With regard to political stability, the German Development Minister said, "Both the government and the opposition should discuss ways for their country's development". European Union (EU) Commissioner for Development Mr. Andris Piebalgs said, "The EU has been a longstanding supporter of Bangladesh as it has been achieving remarkable economic growth. The country has a good track record for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and reputation as a vibrant democracy".

http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=140151&date=2011-06-22

Discuss best ways to develop Bangladesh

EU-German delegates ask govt, opposition

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. 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, 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.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=191024>

Govt working for peaceful Bangladesh

PM also tells EU delegates how democracy disrupted

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed her government's firm commitment to protect the voting right of people, saying "people will decide who will run the country". "We have total confidence in people. We believe that actual development of a country can not be achieved without uninterrupted democracy," the premier was quoted as saying by her Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad. Hasina made the remark when a nine-member delegation led by Dirk Niebel, German federal minister for economic cooperation and development, and Andris Piebalgs, commissioner for development cooperation of the EU, called on her at her office in the morning.

The premier said Bangladesh could not attain its desired development after over 40 years of the country's independence as democracy was interrupted by the military rulers on various occasions in the past. She told the delegation that her government was working relentlessly for the betterment of the country's millions of down-trodden people.

"We are committed to establish Bangladesh a peaceful country through alleviating poverty," she added. Describing the European Union as a trusted friend, the Awami League president recalled the contribution of the EU to restore democracy in the country by extending their support to hold a free, fair and credible election on December 29, 2008.

The German minister and commissioner of the EU highly acclaimed the premier for her role in different international issues especially on the climate change consequences. Mentioning excellent bilateral relations among Bangladesh, Germany and the EU, the delegation expressed hope that the relations would be further cemented in the days to come. Expressing her firm conviction to prevent terrorism and militancy in the country, Hasina said that her government would not allow terrorists to use a single inch of land in the country.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=191036>

EU, Germany wants talks between parties

The European Union and Germany said on Thursday that the political parties of Bangladesh should hold 'constructive talks' to ensure that the 2014 general elections could be held in a free and fair manner with participation of all. 'Parties should not do politics of blockade,' the visiting EU commissioner for development Andris Piebalg told a joint press conference with the visiting German minister for economic cooperation and development Dirk Niebel in Dhaka.

Piebalg said, the 2014 general elections in Bangladesh should be 'free, fair, and inclusive' and 'parties have an obligation to achieve [that]'. 'People have achieved huge progress in social and economic sectors. They also deserve political progress,' he said, adding, 'Constructive talks should be held between the parties.' Asked about conflicting stances of the major political parties, the EU commissioner said, 'It is not for us to take a position [on the caretaker government issue].'

German minister Dirk Niebel seconded the statement made by the EU official. Niebel said, 'Political parties have to find out a solution together for holding free, fair, democratic, and inclusive elections in 2014.' Making an oblique reference to the opposition's programmes, the German minister said, 'Even if you are in the opposition, you are elected for doing politics for people.'

He also pointed out that 'Today's opposition is tomorrow's government'. Niebel said Germany would open an office of the Political Foundation in Dhaka for working with political parties for political education of the people. On development activities, he said the pace of implementation of the projects was slow in Bangladesh. Germany wants to see better administration of project implementation, he said, adding, 'Money should be used actively, efficiently, and sustainably so that not a penny is wasted.' They lauded Bangladesh for reducing poverty from 40 per cent in 2005 to 31 per cent in 2010 and for attaining progress in social and economic sectors. However, they said, poverty 'is still a matter of concern'. Asked about extrajudicial killings by law-enforcement agencies including the Rapid Action Battalion, the EU commissioner said rule of law meant justice for any person any where. 'Every one should have a chance to defend his or her side.'

Piebalg and Niebel also called together on prime minister Sheikh Hasina, finance minister AMA Muhith, and a select group of representatives of the civil society and the media. They left Dhaka by a German Air Force aircraft on Thursday night.

<http://newagebd.com/newspaper1/frontpage/23677.html>

EU, Germany hope for solution to CG dispute

European Union (EU) and Germany have called upon political parties of Bangladesh to work together to find out a solution to the dispute over the caretaker government for ensuring free, fair and inclusive elections in 2014. Visiting EU commissioner for development Andris Piebalgs and German federal minister for economic cooperation and development Dirk Niebel gave the call at a joint press conference at the EU Delegation Office in the capital on

Thursday. "We would call on parties to really work to ensure 2014 elections free, fair and inclusive. In my opinion, parties have an obligation to work together to achieve democratic progress. People of Bangladesh deserve political progress," Piebalgs said. On the same issue, German minister Niebel said, "The parties are in obligation to find out a solution for participation of government and opposition in elections in 2014 which must be free, fair, democratic and inclusive. I am sure politicians are able to solve the problems because they run for elections." Replying to a question, the EU commissioner said, "We know they (major parties) have different views. It's up to them to discuss the issue. It's not for us to take a position on this. We are calling on for constructive talks between parties in the interests of the nation." "We have a common opinion on this point," said the German minister. In democracy one could not make politics of blockage, he said, adding: "Even if you are in opposition you are elected to make politics. Both (government and opposition) belong together. Today's opposition is tomorrow's government and vice versa."

<http://www.theindependentbd.com/national/57288-eu-germany-hope-for-solution-to-cg-dispute.html>

Deals signed for 35m euro German grant

The government has signed four separate deals with German government to receive 35.2 million Euros as grant for four power and rural infrastructure development projects. Bangladesh Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and Director of German financing organisation KfW stephan Opitz signed the agreements on their sides on Thursday in the city. The grant will be spent for implementing four projects including— Modernisation of ashuganj Power Plant, Energy Efficiency Programme III (phase I and II) and Rural Infrastructure Improvement Programme (Phase III).

Meanwhile, the German organisations working in Dhaka have settled under one roof in the premises namely 'German House'. German Minister for Development Economic Cooperation and Development Dirk Niebel, German Ambassador in Dhaka Holger Michael and Bangladesh Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan jointly inaugurated the house on Thursday at Gulshan in the capital.

German Development Organisations—GIZ, KfW and DEG along with the Bangladesh-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BGCCI) and Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) have all become the part of the 'German House'. "It is only by keeping up a close exchange and tackling the challenges together that we will manage to find ideas and solutions for the future and make development cooperation even more effective", the German minister said. He added that the doors of the House should always be open to all its Bangladeshi partners. ERD secretary said: "We congratulate you on the streamlining and consolidation of the various arms of German support to Bangladesh under one roof."

The policy of the German development partners in Bangladesh does align with the goals the Bangladesh Government, he added. The German Development Cooperation has been working in Bangladesh since its

independence. The shared offices, however, were established ten years ago when GIZ moved first into the now called 'German House' followed by the financial cooperation organisation KfW. "Coordination and alignment when working in the same fields, starts at home, and this is the idea behind having all these German organisations in one place", said Olaf Handloegten, country director of GIZ in Dhaka.

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