

## Major changes in NGO policy likely

UNB, Dhaka

The government is reportedly planning major changes in NGO policy to bring the voluntary organisations under its direct control.

NGO community apprehends the government move will affect inflow of funds from the donor agencies and countries not only through their channels but also through government passages, leaving negative impacts on overall development activities of the country.

Apart from planning policy changes, the government launched multi-agencies investigation against a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly those active in the fields of democracy, civil society, women empowerment and human rights.

"We consider the government move as a serious influence of four-party alliance partners who are directly opposed to our activities," said head of one leading NGO, on condition of anonymity.

The NGO chief said religious extremists and chauvinists who earlier had fought for a ban on NGOs could convince the BNP, as NGO movement always creates awareness among the masses, particularly the womenfolk.

Apart from the NGO Bureau, sources concerned said, several

intelligence agencies are investigating their activities that NGO community believes have been launched to harass them as their "motion always goes against fundamentalists".

The sources said a high-level meeting of the government on Wednesday specified six NGOs to see through their ins and outs.

The meeting of the cabinet committee on NGOs also suggested major changes in NGO policy to establish government control over their activities.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister and BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan is chair of the cabinet committee.

Sources at the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC), which is under the Prime Minister's Office, said they were also proceeding files to sue 11 NGOs. The government, they said, is convinced that they were linked to the former ruling party, Awami League.

On approval from the top level, they said, heads of the NGOs are likely to be sued on corruption charges shortly.

The NGO Affairs Bureau, which is also under the PMO, earlier this month had issued letters to a number of NGOs asking clarification about expenditures of some of their programmes, categorically related to women awareness and women empowerment.

The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) considers the move aimed at harassing the NGOs which the NGO Affairs Bureau denied.

"It's a regular activity. It's a common practice that we'll inquire about audit. We didn't target anybody or specified anyone," Bureau Director General Mahmudur Reza Chowdhury told UNB.

He said for last 11 years this kind of clarification had been wanted or inspections made.

"We'll have to see if there is any irregularity in the audit or any complaint," the NGO Affairs Bureau DG said dismissing the allegation about motives for harassment.

Among the NGOs from whom financial explanations have been sought, regarding some programmes since 1995, are Proshika that always had confrontation with communal forces as well as Prip Trust, Bangladesh Nari Progoti Sangha, IVS and CDS.

Against the backdrop of present situation, the ADAB on Wednesday held a meeting and noted with serious concern that since it assumed power, the four-party government had been "harassing" NGOs by various means, creating pressure on them and causing obstruction instead of cooperation.

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