

Four projects worth Tk 1189cr approved

11 secondary schools, six colleges to be set up in city

UNB, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved four development projects involving Tk 1189 crore, including a project to build 11 secondary schools and six colleges in the city.

Ecneec Chairperson and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave the approval at the Ecneec meeting at the NEC conference room at Shere-e-Banglanagar in the city.

Of the amount, Tk 834 crore will come from the government exchequer with Tk 355 crore is being allocated as project assistance, said Planning Minister AK Khandaker while briefing reporters after the meeting.

He said the project aimed at setting up 11 secondary schools and six colleges in the Dhaka Metropolis under the Education Ministry would cost Tk 435 crore to be entirely borne by the government. The tenure of the project is January 2010 to December 2013.

"The purpose of setting up government secondary schools and colleges would be to spread education as well as to ensure standard education in the proposed schools and colleges," the planning minister added.

The secondary schools would be constructed Uttara, Pallabi, Badda, Demra, Kamrangirchar, Hajariabagh, Shah Ali, Kafrul, Gulshan, Jatrabari and Sabujbagh in the city. The colleges would be set up at Uttara, Pallabi, Badda, Demra, Kamrangirchar and Khilgaon.

Planning Secretary Habibullah Majumder was present at the briefing.

The other projects are an emergency disaster rehabilitation project (revised) under the Communications Ministry involving Tk 436 crore, construction of a bridge on the River Surma in Sunamganj (another revised project under the Communications Ministry) at Tk 65 crore and construction of the BMA Bangabandhu Complex at Bhatiar in Chittagong under the Defence Ministry at a cost of Tk 253 crore.

Comprehensive law a must to check labour trafficking

IOM official Laura Thompson tells *The Daily Star*

PORIMOL PALMA

A comprehensive anti-trafficking law, its enforcement, and cooperation among the labour-sending countries could largely help check labour trafficking, a phenomena rising in line with increased labour migration in recent times, IOM Deputy Director General Laura Thompson said.

"Earlier, we used to say migrants' trafficking are mostly for women and children for sexual exploitation. And now men are very much exploited through labour trafficking," she said in an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star*.

There are fake agencies and criminal networks hiring people for particular jobs abroad but leave them jobless, which is nothing but trafficking of labour, said Laura Thompson, who visited Bangladesh from June 8 to 10.

"They [workers] are put in very precarious situations and not paid sometimes," she said, adding that smuggling and trafficking are manifestation of organised crimes just like those of drugs and arms traffickers. "It is the same network and we haven't been able to stop it."

The observation of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) official came in the wake of a series of allegations that the workers hired by manpower agencies and

brokers do not get the promised job abroad, are left without salaries and sometimes beaten or even locked in rooms.

Recently, 39 Bangladeshi workers hired for jobs in Liberia returned home after being cheated. Bangladeshi seamen hired to work in Benin were left without salaries for months. The list of such cases in Libya, Malaysia, Singapore, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and more can go on and on.

Presently, an estimated 7 million Bangladeshis work abroad and send home some \$11 billion a year. Experts, however, say the existing regulatory framework is too inadequate to protect migrants' interests.

Raising awareness among people vulnerable to trafficking and training customs and airport officials are crucial to check irregular migration, Laura said and also emphasised the need for a comprehensive law covering men, women and children.

"When you don't have the legal framework, you cannot do anything when you accuse someone," said Laura, a former ambassador and permanent representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations.

Law is not the solution, but a necessary element for prosecution, she said, adding that trained people are also needed to enforce it.

But no country in this region has a compre-



PHOTO: STAR

IOM Deputy Director General Laura Thompson.

hensive anti-trafficking legal system, she noted. Bangladesh has initiated drafting such a law, which is laudable, she added.

Laura said that earlier people would migrate

mainly to the global North, but now many are moving within the global South, meaning within Asia and Africa. Presently, 220 million people are migrants and the figure will rise.

Also, there were countries that used to be only the hosts, but now many migrant-sending countries like India and Mexico are both migrant-sending and receiving countries. Women are now migrating to other countries on their own with independent decision.

"Migration in the last 20 to 25 years has gone through a lot of changes that require new approaches to handle," Laura said.

IOM is promoting regional consultative process throughout the world, she said and referred to the Colombo Process, an initiative of 11 Asian labour-sending countries aimed at protecting migrants' rights.

"It is not preferable that you send 10 million people and 5 million are exploited. Rather, you send seven million and they all are protected," Laura said, adding that having dialogues between the sending and receiving countries is quite important to make the employers responsible for the violations of rights.

She also called for productive use of remittances sent by the migrants so that it can create opportunities for jobs to help not only the families, but also the communities. "This needs education and we are doing that," she said.



PHOTO: BNP

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia, left, holds talks with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, right, at Sonargaon Hotel in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

Planned villages to ensure more land for food production: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government will redesign every village in a planned manner in order to dedicate greater amount of agricultural land to increased food production.

Addressing the launching of a three-month tree plantation programme of the Bangladesh Krishak League at Ganobhaban, she said all installations in a village including schools and hospitals have to be established according to a pattern that ensures the best use of agriculture land.

Hasina urged the people not to waste a single inch of agricultural land as she stressed that increasing food production is a must to ensure adequate food for the large population of the country.

She said no piece of land should be left uncultivated as Bangladesh's landmass is limited, but its population has already taken on massive proportions.

She said the government will revive the project "one home, one farm" project in a bid to increase food production of the country. "If necessary, the government will give financial assistance to the home owners to create farms inside their home areas,"

she said. Hasina suggested that there will be cooperatives of the home farmers and the cooperatives will collect the agriculture produce from the homes and market them.

In this regard, she laid emphasis building small and medium industries across the country and going for processed agriculture products including organic foods. She said organic foods of Bangladesh enjoy high demand in the international markets.

Announcing stern action against those felling trees and damaging the environment, the PM mentioned her government's steps to stop recent tree felling in the coastal areas.

"I had directed the authorities concerned to arrest the persons even if they are from my party" she said.

She requested everyone to plant three saplings of medicinal, timber and fruit trees to create a balanced environment in the country.

She said realising the indispensability of farmers and agriculture, Bangladesh Awami League had initiated the "Save Farmers, Save Country" movement.

Describing the farmers as the principal force behind food production in the country, she said her government has attached top priority to farmers' welfare and the agriculture sector's

development.

She also mentioned her government's strong commitment to achieving universal food security for every citizen of the land, as in her previous 1996-2001 tenure.

"This is our policy and priority to give our best efforts to making a food-sufficient Bangladesh," she said.

The Prime Minister lamented that the BNP-Jamaat government had turned Bangladesh into a food-deficient country as they believe in begging rather than becoming self-reliant.

Hasina said if that BNP-Jamaat government would have continued the development works initiated by her previous government, then at present people would not be suffering as much. She also blamed the last caretaker government for bringing the country's development to a stalemate through "excessive activities."

With Bangladesh Krishak League President Dr Mirza Jalil in the chair, the function was also addressed by Minister for Food and Disaster Management Dr Abdur Razzaque and Awami League Organising Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim.

The Prime Minister later planted three saplings on the Ganobhaban premises.





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