

# \$1.7b project to train workers

## STAR BUSINESS REPORT

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The government yesterday formally launched a \$1.7 billion project to train 2.6 lakh workers and mid-level managers in different sectors over the next five years.

“We have taken up this project as we will not be able to achieve our planned development goals without improving the skills of the workers and mid-level managers,” Finance Minister AMA Muhith said at the launch of the project.

The Skills for Employment and Investment Programme will mostly be financed by the Asian Development Bank, with the government providing \$200 million.

The other development partners will chip in later in the project, which will be implemented by the finance ministry.

The first-phase of the project has already been completed, under which 2,096 garment workers were given training by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Muhith handed out certificates to the trainees at the event, which can be used when applying for jobs in Malaysia or other countries that the migrant workers go in search of employment.

In the absence of skilled trainers in Bangladesh, foreigners take away \$4 billion from the country in salaries and allowance a

year, according to the finance minister.

The length of the training courses will vary from one month to six months and the educational qualification for the trainees has been fixed between primary school certificates and graduation levels.

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services and the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training will soon start their training programmes under the project.

SEIP Project Director Jalal Ahmed said the workers will receive training on 15 different subjects, including enhancing managerial capacity, technology, sewing operations and computer literacy.

The training institutions will also have to manage jobs for 70 percent of the trainees after completion of the certificate courses, as per the terms of SEIP. If the training partners fail to do so, their performance would be considered poor, said Ahmed, who is also an additional secretary to the finance ministry.

Other than the six associations and trade bodies, the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation and the Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation are also the training partners of SEIP, which is open to new entrants and semi-skilled workers.

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BGMEA will train more than 43,800 workers and mid-level officers in phases and the members of the association will have to manage jobs for about 28,000 workers, said the SEIP project director. A total of 23 ministries are involved in the SEIP, and the second phase of the project will start soon.

BGMEA Vice-President Reaz-bin-Mahmood said the association will spread its training programme across

three years. It will be held in 39 centres of 21 districts. Some 356 mid-level managers of 11 factories have already got the training and another 1,350 are in the process of getting it.

ADB Team Leader Brajesh Panth said productivity improvement for garment workers is very important for achieving the export target of \$50 billion by 2021.

BGMEA President-select Siddiqur Rahman urged the government to introduce a special exchange rate for

the dollar, as garment exporters are losing money due to the appreciation of the taka against the US currency.

Former BGMEA President Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin said every year more than two million new people enter the job market but the majority of them do not have any skills.

So the SEIP project will help them receive training on sewing operation, management, supervision and technology, he added.