

Rebuild country's economy : Khaleda

NAOGAON, Dec 3 (UNB): Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today said overall development of an agrarian country like Bangladesh is not possible without changing the lot of the peasantry.

She was speaking at a mammoth peasant rally at Atrai in the northern district on the occasion of inauguration of the re-excavation work of "Zia Canal."

Previously known as Nalmara Khaal, the canal was re-excavated first in 1980 and renamed after Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman who inaugurated it.

Recalling Zia's initiative in canal digging and re-excavation, she said the late leader had

realised that country's progress depended on the improvement of the socio-economic condition of rural masses.

An additional 12 lakh metric tons of foodgrain was produced in the country following introduction of the programme, the Prime Minister reminded.

Treading her late husband's path, Begum Zia launched a countrywide canal-digging and re-excavation programme on November 22 last at Demra near the capital.

The government has now redesigned the programme meticulously so that it yields desired results and help improve the lot of the rural people.

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Begum Zia said and referred to a high-level national committee formed in this regard.

She called upon the people irrespective of party affiliations to participate in the programme en masse to make the country self-reliant in food and ensure welfare of the commonman.

More than 12 lakh people would be beneficiaries of the re-excavation of about 4.72-kilometre canal which links the rivers Atrai and Chhoto Jamuna in the district.

Nearly 46,000 hectares of land will be saved from flood onslaughts while an additional one lakh acres of land can be brought under cultivation during the dry season by means of irrigation.

The digging and redigging of canals and ponds, which has started in different parts of the country, is designed to facilitate irrigation, flood control and pisciculture.

Trees planted on both sides of the canals will help increase the greenery and improve the degrading environment, the Prime Minister remarked.

The people would be involved with welfare programmes, Begum Zia said, adding the canal excavation and re-excavation would be carried out voluntarily

as the government did not have all the required resources.

Integration of people with national development programmes is the prime objective of democracy."

She gave a clarion call for all to rebuild the country and its economy, ruined by nine years of autocracy, without which "our independence will be meaningless."

The Prime Minister said her government would encourage small and cottage industries in rural areas to gear up economic activities and solve the unemployment problem.

Begum Zia urged the people of the area to resist smuggling at any cost, saying it is squeezing the market of local products and, thereby, adversely affecting indigenous industries and hindering growth of new ones.

About the local problems, she said the ongoing construction of Naogaon road would be completed in time, the Naogaon Hospital upgraded to a 100-bed one and the Barendra Project restarted soon.

Thousands of men, women and people from all walks of life joined the Prime Minister with spade in hands in inauguration of the canal re-excavation programme.

Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, State Minister for Land Kabir Hossain, State Minister for Finance Mojibur Rahman, State Minister for Law Barrister Aminul Huq, Farida Hassan, MP and local MP Alangir Hossain also spoke on the occasion.