

Hillary visits NGO projects in Jessore

US to give aid for spread of female education

PANCHBARIA (Jessore), Apr 3 : The visiting US First Lady Ms Hillary Rodham Clinton disclosed here today that the United States had a plan to extend Assistance to Bangladesh to spread female education.

Talking to BSS Ms Clinton expressed her satisfaction over the level of awareness of women in Bangladesh.

Earlier, Ms Clinton was greeted by thousands of people of the adjoining villages as she entered the premise of Panchbaria-Baldanga Government Primary School.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Ms Sarwari Rahman and Secretary Primary and Mass Education Division Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed received the US First Lady at the school gate.

As Ms Clinton entered the school where Food-for-Education Programme had been introduced last year, students welcomed her with physical training display and songs.

Ms Sarwari Rahman and Kazi Rakibuddin briefed Ms Clinton about the favourable impact of the food-for-education programme to reduce dropouts and increase enrolment in primary schools.

She was told that a family having two school-going children and belonging to underprivileged sections of society are given 20 kg wheat a month while a family with one school-going child is given 15 kg wheat a month.

out of a total of 387 students of the school, 244 enjoy the bene-

fit.

She moved from one class of the school to another and talked freely with the students.

Later, Ms Clinton together with her daughter Chelsea went to the adjoining Panchbaria Secondary Girls High School and spent sometime with the students of Class VII. She also introduced her daughter, a tenth grader, to the students of the class.

In her introductory remarks she said, showing the world map, "I have come all the way from our country to acquaint myself better with your condition and enhance my experiences about your country. She wanted to know from the students the subjects taught in their classes. Some of the students promptly replied to the queries of the US First Lady.

She frankly narrated her experiences how their family

moved from Arkansas state to the White House when Mr Bill Clinton became President of the United States. She also shared her experiences of the visits to other South Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Nepal with the students of the school.

Then Ms Clinton on her way to Dhaka drove in a motorcade to the airport where she posed for group photographs with Bangladeshi and US Airforce Crew.

Ms. Clinton and their

daughter Chelsea were seen off at the Jessore airport by Chief of Air Staff Air Vice Marshal Altaf Hussain Chowdhury, senior civil and military officials.

MASHIHATI VILLAGE

According to another report : It was indeed a memo-

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table experience for the people of this remote village, 20 miles from Jessore, as the US First Lady Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton visited them Mashihat, Jhenidah today.

Ms Clinton together with her daughter Chelsea spent more than an hour in the sultry Chaitra with the otherwise neglected people of this quiet village to better acquaint herself with the grassroots operations of the country's Grameen Bank.

Prof M Yunus who is the founder of the widely acclaimed NGO, received Ms. Clinton and introduced her to the members of the bank.

Earlier, minor children be-

longing to the village greeted Ms. Clinton heartily with songs and physical training (PT) display.

She was visibly impressed with the performance of the tiny tots and exchanged greetings with them. She was thankful to the villagers for their long wait for her.

Minister in waiting Ms. Sarwari Rahman, who is State Minister in charge of Women and Children Affairs, was present. As her motorcade drove from airport to the village hundreds of people greeted her waving hands from both sides of the road.

Deputy Head of Mission of US Embassy James Nach and a White House press team were among others who accompanied the US First Lady.

Talking freely with some of the members of Grameen Bank Ms. Clinton said, "I have heard about the bank 10 years before. Now I have come to learn from you how the bank has benefited you to become self-reliant in society."

Ms. Shefali, S Ambia and Ms. Rina narrated their stories to the visiting US First Lady how they have been benefitted becoming associated with the Grameen Bank. Rina who is chairman of a group said with confidence, "before becoming Grameen Bank member I was a pauper. Today I have a house, a few head of cattle and poultry birds. I also send my children to school and follow the disciplines of the bank."

She dwelt at length the long story of the gradual enhancement of the ceiling of Grameen loan with the improvement of her financial condition.

Ms Clinton also replied to some of the queries of the Grameen Bank members.

In reply to one of the questions she said, "I have started earning my income when I was 13. Some-

times my income exceeded the income of my husband. I have stopped working since moving to the White House when my husband became the President."

Responding to a questioner, she said, "I wish I could have one or two more children. But we are so happy with our daughter that we

are proud of Chelsea."

Referring to observations of one of the members Ms Clinton said she would convey her invitation to President Bill Clinton to visit Bangladesh at his convenient time.

Ms. Clinton showed interest in some of the products displayed in stalls under a beautiful thatched roof. All the products put on display in 18 stalls were manufactured by members of the Bank. The products included jamdani saree, bamboo and cane furniture, brass wares, etc. One

of the Grameen members showed her the technique to wear a saree. She was given some local products as gifts.

Narrating experiences to become a Grameen Bank member Ms Najma said, "Some well-to-do members of society discouraged me to become a member. They wanted us to be permanently dependent living on their left-overs." She said, "Association with the Bank has given me a new identity and made me self-reliant in society." She boastfully recalled her experiences when members of such families were seeking their cooperation. Ms. Najma has another identity as a member of the Union Parishad. She was informed that dowry practice and divorce rate had gone down in the area.

During the course of free and frank exchange of views with the members of Grameen Bank Ms Clinton said, "Today you have learnt how to take collective decision. It will take you a long way," she observed.

As Ms Clinton entered the venue of the stalls tiny tots received her singing gambhira, jari and other folk songs reflecting the cultural heritage of rural Bangladesh.

BRAC SCHOOL

According to another report from Churamankathi, Jessore, it was a pleasant surprise for the children of BRAC school when the US First Lady Ms Hillary Clinton with her daughter Chelsea visited them here today.

The children and local people greeted them heartily by clapping and singing.

As she entered the school premises BRAC Executive Director Fazle Hasan Abed

received her.

He briefed her how the programme of Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) introduced by BRAC had been

started with 22 schools in 1985. The number of such schools today is 267 thousand covering 54 out of 64 administrative districts of the country.

Mamata Ranji Biswas, a teacher of the school narrated the functioning of the school.

Replies to Ms Clinton's query Mamata said the school timing was flexible with the needs of the children in their families.

She was further informed that

students had their lessons simultaneously with time for fun, singing, dancing, acting and games.

Ms. Clinton had words of praise for the performance of the programme of BRAC. Mr Abed presented Ms. Clinton with a video cassette on the school programme.

CWFP CLINIC

Later, Ms. Clinton walked through the "Kutcha" road braving scorching heat to visit a satellite clinic run by Concerned Women for Family Planning (CWFP) in the same village.

As she was walking with her daughter the people of the village gathered on both sides of the road to have a glimpse of the US First Lady. She waved to the people smilingly.

Executive Director of CWFP welcoming Ms Clinton to the clinic premises narrated different aspects of ongoing and perspective programmes. She said CWFP was responsible for distributing contraceptives to women and providing health and nutrition education services to mothers and children.

She further informed Ms. Clinton that CWFP was operating 22 project sites covering a total of about 1.4 million population.

BSS adds the US-Bangladesh joint training programme designed to enhance the knowledge and capabilities of Bangladesh Air Force personnel in aeromedical operation for mass evacuation during natural disaster is in progress at the BAF Base, Matiur Rahman here according to an ISPR press release.

A joint team of experts from the United States Air Force and the Bangladesh Air Force along with their aircraft and helicopters are taking part in the programme.