

\$16b plan to up education quality

Biggest-ever education sector programme to be financed by govt, WB and ADB; the two donors to give \$500m each for the 5-year scheme

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The government plans to take up a massive \$16 billion programme for secondary education to transform the sector by improving the quality of education and developing employability skills of secondary graduates.

The "Secondary Education Development Programme" will be the biggest-ever project in the country's education sector after the Tk 22,196-crore "Third Primary Education Development Programme" launched in 2011.

The five-year programme will be financed by the government, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, a top education ministry official told The Daily Star, wishing not to be named.

"The entire secondary education sector will be overhauled under it," the official said.

The World Bank and ADB would provide \$500 million each and the government will bear the rest. The amount to be given by the donor agencies is likely to be increased in future, he said, adding Unesco, Unicef and British Council will provide technical assistance.

Contacted, Chowdhury Mufad Ahmed, additional secretary of the education ministry, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already given approval in principle for the programme.

The government initially plans to implement the programme from January next year, he told The Daily Star.

The programme would cover grade VI to XII, annually supporting more than 1.2 crore students and 300,000 teachers from over 20,000 schools, 10,000 madrasas and 1,000 school-based vocational/technical institutions across the country, said officials of the ministry.

Recently, the education and finance ministers held a formal meeting to discuss the plan in the presence of representatives of donor agencies. The programme is likely to get approval from the World Bank board in next fiscal year.

Secondary education is fragmented across projects. A total of 13 development projects involving around Tk 25,000 crore are now being implemented in this sector,

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but, sources said, there is a lack of coordination among those. Of the 13, nine projects are for the improvement of secondary education. Some of projects are going well while there are debates over some others.

If the proposed programme gets nod, all other projects will come under it, they added.

The reform areas that the programme proposes include teacher salary subsidies to non-government schools in the form of monthly payment order (MPO), teacher rationalisation and performance management, institutionalisation of learning assessments, curriculum and examinations, adolescent girls' health and empowerment and transition of class VI-VIII to primary education.

There has been a debate over the quality of secondary education with experts pointing out several problems that fail to equip students with the knowledge or skills the economy needs.

Inadequate schools, heavy school curriculum, complex textbooks, outdated teaching methods and poor teaching-learning approaches, dropping out, teacher's shortage and poor infrastructural facilities are some of the problems the secondary level is faced with.

A government survey, published last year, showed that around 50 percent of eighth graders do not have expected level of competence in English and 46 percent of them lack proficiency in mathematics.

The teacher-student ratio stands at 1:41 while the size of the average classroom is 60. Around 68 percent of teachers in schools are trained, according to Bangladesh Education Statistics 2015

published by Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information & Statistics.

THREE PRIORITY AREAS

The proposed programme will have three priority results areas – first one being "Enhanced Quality and Relevance of Secondary Education", officials said.

Under the first area, productivity of secondary graduates would be enhanced by developing their cognitive and technical skills so that they could succeed in job sector.

The curriculum and textbooks for class IX to XII would be revised and a pre-vocational and vocational curriculum would be introduced in grades XI and XII to impart skills relevant to the national and international job market.

One of the major focuses would be strengthening teachers' quality and capacity. Reforms would be brought to the teacher management system through upgrading and delivering pre-service training and in-service training.

A teacher performance management system would also be developed.

A new examination system in class VIII, X and XII would be adopted to achieve improved classroom assessment and national learning assessment.

There will be initiatives to improve school infrastructure – development of classrooms, water and sanitation facilities, science and computer labs, and other physical facilities.

In order to strengthen school-based management, measures will be taken to enhance the capacity of head teachers by scaling up the National Academy for Education Management (Naem) training programme for them. An accountability mechanism would also be introduced at the school level.

School salary and non-salary grant financing mechanism (both needs-based

and performance-based) will be developed and implemented by 2018.

The second result area "Increased Equitable Access, and Retention to Secondary Education" is primarily aimed at ensuring equitable access to secondary education and improving retention rate, especially in class VIII and X where the dropout rate is very high particularly among girls.

The programme will harmonise the currently implemented multiple stipends schemes with varying rates and modalities.

It will give special attention to the adolescent girls and address the key issues causing their dropouts. Supplementary stipends will be provided and toilet and sanitation facilities will be ensured.

Besides, counselling and awareness programmes would be conducted at the school level on girls' health, hygiene and empowerment.

The third result area "Strengthened Governance, Management, And Administration" deals with improving the governance, management, and administration of the education system.

As part of it, the education ministry will put in place a fully functional decentralised secondary education management system in all zones, districts, upazilas, and schools for planning, budgeting, and service delivery.

It would also support the transition to restructured school system as recommended by National Education Policy-2010, which proposed primary education from class I to VIII and secondary education from IX to XII.

Sources said class VI-VIII would come under primary education most likely within the programme period.