

# WB to provide \$100m to improve secondary edn

The World Bank today approved a 100 million US dollar credit from the International Development Association (IDA) to support the government of Bangladesh's efforts to deepen and sustain reforms in the education sector, reports BSS.

An agreement in this regard will be signed today (Saturday) in Dhaka, a press release said.

The Third Programmatic Education Sector Development Support Credit is designed to address systemic governance issues in order to make the best use of the resources in improving quality and enhancing access to secondary education.

Gross primary enrollment rates in Bangladesh are around 90 percent, and the secondary enroll-

ment rate has more than doubled to 57 percent over the past two decades.

The country has already met the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on gender parity in primary and secondary schooling. However, while access to secondary education has increased considerably, lack of systemic improvement to deal with the rapid expansion has caused quality to suffer.

Despite impressive progress, Bangladesh needs substantial improvement in providing quality education in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and its Education for all targets, said Xian Zhu, World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh.

This programme supports reforms aimed at tackling governance problems in secondary education, enhancing quality of secondary school teachers and tying government support to the performance of the institutions. We hope this will also lead to greater access to secondary education for

all children, especially the poor and marginalized who cannot afford the expenses of secondary schooling.

In secondary and higher secondary education, Bangladesh has a unique system of public-private partnership which combines public financing with private provision of education.

The system has a tremendous potential if properly managed. However, it was subject to many undue influences in the past which led to a lack of transparency in the recognition of schools for subvention, recruitment of teachers and production of textbooks. Most importantly, once an institution started getting subvention, there was no incentive for better performance as the support from the government was more or less guaranteed.

To improve governance and address these issues, the government has started implementing a substantive policy reform agenda in secondary education supported

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by this series of credits.

The programme particularly focuses on (i) increasing accountability and transparency in the use and allocation of resources with greater stakeholder participation and greater resource allocation for poorer and disadvantaged children; (ii) streamlining the teacher

recruitment process to ensure the selection of best candidates as teachers free from all kinds of influences; and (iii) enhancing quality of textbooks through competitive production.

The Government has successfully implemented the first two phases of the reforms. With regard to systemic improvement, it has linked financing of institutions to performance, leading to the suspension of subsidies to the worst performing institutions.

At the same time, the government has taken measures to help the institutions in the disadvantaged and remote areas to perform better so that the children from the disadvantaged communities, particularly the first generation learners, are not punished for the strict adherence to the performance criteria.

New schools are also being established in underserved and disadvantaged areas. The composition of school management committees has been reformulated to ensure greater community voices, particularly of women, in monitoring institutions activities, the press release added.

Many of the systemic hindrances are being removed, said Subrata S. Dhar, World Bank senior operations officer in Education and the Task leader for the pro-

For example, the government has established a Non-government Teachers Registration and Certification Authority for secondary education which certifies, through a rigorous testing process, a pool of potential teachers from which the school management committees must recruit the teachers to receive the government support.

The first credit was approved by the World Bank on August 29, 2004 and the second on February 7, 2006. This third operation will help the government build on the previous two phases of its reform agenda, and move forward with the third set of reforms in order to deepen and consolidate the gains.

The credit from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's concessional arm, has 40 years to maturity with a 10-year grace period; it carries a service charge of 0.75 percent.