

Dutch help in river dredging, water management sought

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday requested the Netherlands to provide technical and financial assistance for water management and river dredging as most of the rivers have silted up and some of them already dead.

"We request the Netherlands to extend their cooperation in this regard," said Abdur Razzak MP, chairman of the standing committee on the Ministry of Water Resources, while addressing the inaugural session of a seminar on 'Dredging Seminar' at Sheraton Hotel as the chief guest.

IHC Merwede, a leading dredger-building company, organised the seminar where Ambassador of the Netherlands Alphons Hennekins was the special guest. Many dredging experts, consultants, and representatives of local banks, shipyards and local media were present at the meet.

Razzak, also former water

resources minister, said the present government headed by Sheikh Hasina has already chalked out a plan of capital dredging for the country's all big and small rivers to remove the sediments carried down by the rivers from upstream.

"The prime minister is very interested in this regard and she has already given directives for working out how it can proceed," he told the function.

Describing water management as a very important issue as Bangladesh is the largest delta in the world, he said dredging the rivers is an imperative for facilitating the flow of river water with a view to protecting people, agriculture and ecology from salinity.

For lack of water flow, silts are gradually deposited in the rivers, saline water intrusion is increasing, damaging agriculture and causing climate change, he said. So, it's essential to immediately remove silts from the

riverbeds for socioeconomic development. "There are some 230 rivers, 57 of them trans-boundary, flowing over the country."

The Dutch envoy, Alphons Hennekins, said Bangladesh is at the heart of the largest deltas of the world and the delta has been created by deposition of billions of tons of sediment carried by the three major rivers - the Padma, the Jamuna and the Meghna. "Each year the major rivers of Bangladesh carry over billion tons of sediment and this sediment load is increasing," he said.

He said the government of Bangladesh has given priority to the water sector and aims to improve the flow and navigation of the river system. "Dredging will be a key instrument to achieve this," he told the meeting, adding that there is no life without water and water management is therefore essential to safeguard the livelihoods and enable economic develop-

ment.

Saying that water management issues connect two countries -- the Netherlands and Bangladesh -- the envoy mentioned that the Netherlands lies at the heart of an important delta and, moreover, around 35 percent of the country lies below sea level. So the existence of his country depends on 24-hour water management.

Emphasising bilateral cooperation, Alphons Hennekins said the Netherlands supports Bangladesh for strengthening its institutions and stimulating capacity building to facilitate the formation of a coherent water management policy.

"We provide technical and financial assistance for coastal zone water management which includes land reclamation," he said, adding that the important part of their future support would be to assist the water sector in Bangladesh to develop a climate change adaptation programme.