

Staff reporter

Stressing the need for popularizing agriculture sector among educated youths, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday directed the officials concerned to take initiatives to encourage the children of farmers so that they do not switch over to any other profession.

"On completion of their study, their (farmers) children don't want to engage in agricultural work. You need to take initiatives to help them change this attitude," she said.

The Prime Minister came up with the directive in her introductory speech at a meeting with senior officials of the Agriculture Ministry at the Bangladesh Secretariat.

She laid emphasis on engaging all students in agricultural work alongside their study. "They'll have to be persuaded that it's an important and scared job."

Sheikh Hasina also directed the officials concerned of the ministry to be more active in implementing the ongoing projects in time maintaining quality and standard of works.

Terming agriculture as the driving force of Bangladesh economy, Hasina said her government has been implementing massive programs for the development of this sector.

In this regard, the Prime Minister mentioned that the Agriculture Ministry is currently implementing 81 projects involving Tk1 336 crore.

The budget allocation for the ministry is increasing every year and Tk 12, 288 crore has been allocated for the current fiscal alone, Hasina said adding about Tk 14, 000 crore were distributed to farmers as agriculture loans in only 2013-14 fiscal for boosting the agricultural production.

She said new work plans were undertaken by her government in 2009 for the development of the agriculture sector, while fertilizer distribution management system has been recast.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh has turned into a food-surplus country in the last five years due to the farsighted measures of her government, while the BNP-led previous government had pushed it to food short.

Hasina said the National Agriculture Policy-2013 has been framed to ensure food safety and nutrition through facing various challenges caused by climate change, increasing productivity and making agriculture sustainable.

Besides, works on formulating National Agriculture Extension Policy-2014 and National Micro-Irrigation Policy-2014 are also progressing while a Master Plan has been formulated for the overall development of agriculture in the southern 14 districts, she added.

Terming the southern region as the bowl of crops, she called upon all concerned to implement the Master Plan in time with coordinated efforts and face the challenges on agriculture in the region.

Hasina highlighted her government's success on researches in agriculture and said the country's scientists uncovered the genome sequence of jute while a number of paddy varieties have been invented in the country that are tolerant to drought, flood and salinity.

This is the results of her government's efforts in strengthening agro-based research activities, she said.

Stressing the need for encouraging scientists and farmers with all possible support, the Prime Minister hoped that all concerned would further contribute to boosting agriculture production reinforcing researches and development activities in the sector.

She also urged the country's scientists for innovating technologies suitable to bringing new char areas in the southern region under cultivation and playing their due role in motivating the farmers to this end.

Terming her government as agriculture and farmers-friendly one, the prices of agriculture materials were reduced remarkably whenever Awami League led government came to power.

In this context, she mentioned that her government reduced the prices of fertilizers four times during its 2009-2013 tenure while BNP-Jamaat government had killed 18 farmers for demanding fertilizers at a reduced rate during 2001-2006.

Hasina said her government has also expanded and modernized irrigation management alongside providing assistance for agriculture materials.

Underscoring the need for involving educated youths in the farm sector, the Prime Minister said her government has been working to modernize the sector and urged all concerned to supplement government efforts in this regard.

Hasina said necessary steps have been taken to make sure so that every farmer family could own at least one agri-equipment, and assured that the area and amount of giving subsidy to agriculture equipment would be extended in phases.

Referring to the marketing of agricultural produces, the Prime Minister said the Agriculture Ministry has been working to further develop the marketing system and ensure the fair prices of farm produces, and asked the officials concerned to play a more active role in this regard.

Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury delivered the welcome address while the secretary and senior officials of the Ministry and heads of different organizations under it attended the meeting.

