

\$1.2 million UNDP grant for safe ship breaking project

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will grant Bangladesh US \$ 1,288,967 equivalent to Taka 7,47,62,000 for the "safe and environment friendly ship recycling" project. With the project, workers and owners operating ship-breaking yards along the coastal belt of the Bay of Bengal may be benefited due to creation of a safe working environment.

The two sides signed an agreement in this regard at a function in the NEC Bhaban at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar here on Tuesday. Secretary of the Economic Relations Division (ERD) Mirza Tasadduq Hossain Beg and UNDP Resident Representative in Bangladesh Jorgen Lissner signed the agreement on behalf of their respective sides.

At present, a total of 32 ship-breaking yards are operating regularly on the beaches, north of Chittagong, and they dismantle and recycle around 60-80 large oceangoing ships every year. However, the ship-breaking industry has never been regulated and falls short in many respects of national and international standards. Few of these recycling yards are registered under the National Factories Act of 1965, and existing labour laws do not cover their workers.

The new UNDP-funded project will bring together all concerned parties - the relevant ministers, the Bangladesh Navy, importers, the Ship-Breakers Association, survey companies, banks, traders, related industries, and workers - in an effort to improve the conditions of the labour force involved and to reduce environmental pollution.

The project will draw extensively on technical expertise from the International Labour Organization (ILO), and it will seek, through a comprehensive approach based on policy dialogue, safety training and public awareness, to align current work practices in the ship-breaking industry with international and national rules and regulations.

The project will be implemented by June 2006.