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Western Marine brings new hope in shipbuilding

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The front-side view of the Western Marine Shipyard Ltd situated on the eastern bank of river Karnaphuli in the port city.-file photo

Western Marine Shipyard Limited (WMSHL) - a Chittagong-based leading shipbuilder in the country, continuing efforts for flourishing of shipbuilding industry and heavy metal engineering. WMSHL that started journey as a full-fledged shipbuilding firm on a mere 1.5 acres of land on the other bank of the Karnaphuli in Chittagong in 2000, by now spreads over 40 acres of land providing employment to some 2000 workforce, said sources in WMSHL. The shipyard has built 130 ships so far. Fifteen of these ships have been exported to eight countries. Western Marine is now building ships for seven countries including Bangladesh, Kenya, India, Denmark, UAE, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Uganda. Ten of these ships are being built for Jindal groups of India, they said. The shipyard became one of the 12 industrial groups and firms that got President's Medal introduced for the first time this year under five categories. The groups and firms were awarded in recognition of their contribution to the country's economy and national income through setting up of industry, production and creation of employment in private sector. Western Marine got first prize in Hi-Tech category. WMSHL Managing Director (MD) Engineer Sakhawat Hossain said the shipbuilding sector of the country enjoys a huge prospect. Huge projects taken up for developing establishments like LNG terminal and power plant at Matarbari in Cox's Bazar, proposed Bay-terminal of Chittagong port, Paira port and Rampal power plant would open up a new horizon for the shipbuilding and heavy engineering industry. Five countries including Japan, China, India, the USA and France are investing around US\$30 billion for implementing the projects in next five years. Around 30 percent of this huge investment would be spent for logistic supports and infrastructural development, some 50 percent of which would be provided from local sources. Heavy metal or engineering works, which are needed in such projects and construction of bridges, can be provided only by shipyards or dockyards. All these establishments would also need a remarkable number of vessels, tugboats, barges and other water transports for their construction and

transportation of raw materials and products. So, the shipbuilding and heavy engineering sector would earn around US\$4.5 billion from only these projects when another more shipbuilding yards would develop in the country if the government provides necessary support. Besides, the Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti 2nd bridges construction and existing bridges rehabilitation project being implemented by Japanese company (at around Tk 88 billion) will also involve huge materials from local sources, said Sakhawat Hossain adding that WMSHL also got works of Tk 600 million from the project. Shipbuilders expect the government to help flourish shipbuilding sector to create employment, save foreign reserve, earn revenue and transport goods through waterways easing pressure on roads, said Shakhawat Hossain. The shipbuilding sector may create direct employment of some 100,000 people and indirect employment of some 200,000 in the country. Skilled workforces of shipbuilding sector can earn revenue several times higher than those of other sectors. With a view to enhancing skills in shipbuilding sector a contract has been signed between Association of Export Oriented Shipbuilding Industries of Bangladesh (AEOSIB) and Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP), Finance Division under Ministry for Finance, he said. Under the contract signed in January this year the finance ministry would provide Tk 294.2 million for giving training on skill enhancement to 10,000 workers of various fields of shipbuilding sector through a three-year programme. The programme would produce trained workforce with enhanced skills and help shipbuilding and heavy engineering industry to get more orders from international market and play role in turning Bangladesh into a middle income country, said Engineer Sakhawat, who is also the general secretary of AEOSIB. Referring that heavy industry in other countries get loan with little interest for long 20 years, Sakhawat called for providing loan with five to six percent interest and increasing time for paying loan interest for such industries. He said setting up of a shipbuilding yard needs around Tk 700 crore. Refunding installment with interest of loan in every month would hamper flourishing shipbuilding industry where it takes around two years to build a ship.

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