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'Green Growth' Project to Start

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President Lee Myung-bak linked a low-carbon, green growth strategy to job creation and an economic stimulus, saying the four-river project that kicked off last week at the Youngsan River will create 200,000 jobs.

The remaining three rivers involved are the Han, Nakdong and Geum.

``Now that we have to take the path for green growth, what is needed is action in earnest," Lee said in a New Year policy address.

The president vowed to jump start what he called a ``Green New Deal" through the \$10 billion project in the neighborhoods of the four major rivers.

Of the \$10 billion, some \$6 billion will be spent dredging the rivers, which will bolster their banks and thus prevent neighboring areas from flooding during the monsoon season. The remaining cash will be spent on dams and water reservoirs near the rivers.

By spending the money to revitalize the four rivers, Lee said the government would create twice as many jobs than if the same amount of investment was made in the manufacturing sector.

Lee's conclusion led to a question: Can the green recovery plan create the aforementioned number of jobs as intended?

Prof. Robert Pollin of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst said a green recovery stimulus project that his team proposed for the U.S. government could create more jobs than if the same investment was made in other sectors.

Pollin said the U.S. can create two million jobs by spending \$100 billion on a green economic recovery package.

In his team's report titled ``Green Recovery: A Program to Create Good Jobs and Start Building a Low-Carbon Economy," Pollin argued the package would create nearly four times more jobs than spending the same amount of money within the oil industry and 30,000 more jobs than a similar amount of spending directed toward household consumption.

Meanwhile, local economists expressed skepticism on the job creation effect.

Prof. Hong Jong-ho of Hanyang University Department of Economics and Finance told The Korea Times that creating hundreds of thousands of good jobs over the next decade is challenging.

Prof. Shin Eun-jong of Dankook University stated the number of jobs presented by the government was exaggerated.

Shin forecast that some 90,000 jobs, mostly blue-collar, might be created through the green stimulus project.

In his address, President Lee pledged to launch a massive campaign for green growth by investing in new and renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, and fuel cells, seeking ways for the efficient use of energy and renewable resources.

Lee said he would set up an oversight committee under the presidential office and introduce a general law dealing with the guidelines for green growth.

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