

# *Adding value to manpower thru skill development*

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Though initiated belatedly, the project, styled Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP), launched in July last year at an estimated cost of over US\$1.0 billion by the Finance Division, to produce skilled manpower for both home and external markets, if sustained, is expected to make a positive contribution to the national economy.

## *News Analysis*

Nearly 16000 skilled hands have already been produced under the project which has an ambitious target of imparting different types of technical and vocational education to about 1.5 million people by 2021. Most of the personnel who received skill training under the SEIP have reportedly secured jobs both at home and abroad.

A number of government training institutes and private trade bodies have been organising training courses, ranging from

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# Adding value to manpower

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15 days to six months, in Dhaka, Chittagong and other district headquarters. The participants, aged between 17 and 35 years, are given scholarships of varying amounts, depending on the duration of training courses.

The SEIP is otherwise different from most other projects. It is not purely a government initiative as a number of multilateral as well as bilateral donors and local private sector stakeholders are involved in its implementation. They together will be contributing the major part of the project fund. More importantly, both the state and the privately-owned training facilities are being used to impart training on both high- and low-end skills to thousands of people. The local apparel and textile sector associations have been taking special interest in the project with a view to meeting their needs of skilled hands at different levels.

However, if considered in the context of past experiences with the government-sponsored programmes and projects, one has enough reasons to be sceptical about the proper implementation of the SEIP. But the situation may be different in the case of this particular programme. Yet there should be strong supervision to help ensure the quality of all the training programmes. This is all the more necessary in view of the countrywide implementation of the SEIP.

Never before, a programme like the SEIP was implemented with the involvement of external donors and local private sector stakeholders. It is important to show good results. There could be some initial hiccups. But if the policymakers at the centre and the executing agen-

cies at the field levels remain alert, the project is bound to deliver good dividends. That might help take up the programme even on a larger scale in the future.

Undeniably, the dearth of skilled manpower has been one of the major weaknesses of the Bangladesh's development efforts. Its shortage has been hurting the domestic industries needing technical as well as efficient management personnel. With a view to meeting the gap, many domestic units, particularly those engaged in textile, leather and information technology sectors, have hired skilled foreign nationals. India and Sri Lanka have been the two major sources of such personnel.

It is a pity that foreign exchange worth several billions is being sent every year out of a country the citizens of which are toiling hard in extreme conditions abroad to earn quite a paltry amount of money each.

Moreover, the scarcity of skilled personnel has kept the country's manpower export largely dependent on unskilled hands. But the demand for unskilled manpower has almost dried up in recent years. The manpower importing countries these days do need people trained in specific skills. Bangladesh does not have much to offer in this respect. Despite having problems with marketing of unskilled manpower, its policymakers have not done enough to produce skilled hands in line with the requirements of external job markets. That is why the country is finding it increasingly difficult to achieve the desired level of growth in manpower export and remittance earning.

The failure to create skilled manpower has also been partly

responsible for the tragic death of a sizeable number of Bangladeshis in seas, on rough terrains and inside freezer vans. These people, mostly unskilled, usually die while trying to enter the countries of their choice illegally.

The skill development project taken up by the Finance Division, thus, is a step in right direction as it would help produce a sizeable number of skilled workers. But compared to the unskilled labour force entering the country's job market every year, the project's capacity appears to be very limited. So, the facilities for imparting training on skills, which are in greater demand both at home and abroad, need to be expanded and sustained.

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## Delhi requests

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Akhaura rail tract would establish a link up to Gundum of Cox's Bazar through Laksam and Chittagong as another project is now underway with the financial assistance of the Asian Development Bank to construct a train line from Dohazari to Gundum.

Bangladesh and India have signed and ratified the TAR, an initiative of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Bangladesh became a part of the 114,000 km railway network in 2009 after the Cabinet ratified three routes.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has taken a move to propose the Padma bridge rail corridor to be included as a new corridor in the TAR as the UNESCAP working group will sit next November to revise the routes that cross different countries.

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