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Skill upgradation and demographic dividend

THAT the country has started moving towards skill upgradation of its human resources is a welcome development. The ministry of finance (MoF) deserves kudos for this. The MoF is implementing a project called Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP) at a cost of over US\$1.0 billion. It was launched in July last year and would run until the end of December 2021. It targets providing skills to an estimated 1.5 million people by 2021. More than 16,000 people have so far been trained under the project and they are working both at home and abroad. There is no denying that the country has the potential to turn its vast manpower into precious human resources.

For the project to extend its outreach and become more effective, it is critical to involve various stakeholders in its implementation. One critical question has yet remained unanswered. Why has not the ministry of labour and manpower, instead of the MoF, initiated the project? The training programme, as reported in this paper in its issue on October 19 last, is being conducted in conjunction with apex trade bodies like Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) and Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS). But other stakeholders like the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FBCCI), leading chambers, foreign chamber and employers' association should have been included in the consultative body of the programme. There should be a comprehensive and genuine survey of the needs, in close consultations with all such stakeholders.

The demographic dividend that the country enjoys now because of a decline in its mortality and fertility rates and the subsequent change in the age structure of its population, can lead to a surge in its economic growth rate. The decline in mortality and fertility rates is often accompanied by an increase in average life expectancy. This increases the size of the working-age population that is termed "demographic dividend". In 2011, around 64.59 per cent of the country's population belonged to the working-age group. This is expected to reach 67.53 per cent in 2051. Goldman Sachs has listed Bangladesh among its 'Next 11' countries that have the potential to become major economies mainly because of its young population.

The country has now around 485 training institutes. But most of such institutes do not offer training based on market and demand. So, it is an urgent need to provide right type of training to the young workforce with proper coordination of private and public sectors. There is also a need for upgradation of skills of the workforce for higher productivity. The demand for manual work is declining gradually across the world as most companies are focusing on automation for increasing productivity. This automation has started even at home in the construction work of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge. The foreign company will reportedly use modern technology to build the Padma Bridge, requiring less manual work. Around 8,000 people were engaged to build Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna river whereas only 800 people will be needed for the construction of the Padma Bridge. Upgradation of skill of human resources has thus become an urgent need in today's world.

There is an urgent need to provide right type of training to the young workforce with proper coordination of private and public sectors. The demand is now for more skilled human resources to ensure higher productivity