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## Roadmap for skill development for sustainable growth

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The government has reportedly drawn up a roadmap for skill development which is aimed at accelerated and sustainable economic growth of the country. The roadmap, which stretches up to 2050, has several interim targets to get to the long-term goal along the higher development trajectory.

According to the roadmap, the government wants to train up a total of 5.724 million people by 2020, some 7.006 million by 2025, 8.932 million by 2030, 13.760 million by 2040 and 20.326 million by 2050. Currently, four projects are being implemented by the government in collaboration with the development partners through different ministries on way to the goals.

The projects are: Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP), Skills and Employment Programme in Bangladesh (SEP-B), Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) and the Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP).

On top of all is readymade garments (RMG) labour skills development with a target to raise skilled people in the category to 1.442 million by 2020. The plan eyes 6.706 million by 2050 in the apparel sector, where skilled manpower is hired from abroad. The other manufacturing areas where the government put its thrust are leather, light engineering, textiles, pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding, ceramics, furniture, food manufacturing, construction, ICT, tourism and hospitality.

Overseas employment of skilled hands is also a priority. The government is willing to bring a reform in the skill-development system for ensuring flexible and responsive delivery mechanisms.

SEIP, being implemented under the Finance Division, supports government reforms targeting skills development. It helps catalyse the private sector in a major way through market-responsive skills development and forging partnerships with public training institutes to make skills development responsive to emerging labour-market needs.

SEIP is a multi-tranche project and in the first phase it will run up to December 2017. In its first phase six priority sectors have been included: readymade garments and textiles, construction, information technology, light engineering and manufacturing, leather and footwear, and shipbuilding. It has a target to support skills training of 260,000 trainees, 70 per cent of whom will be provided with gainful jobs.

STEP wants to strengthen selected public and private skills training institutes to improve training quality and employability of the trainees. It provides grants to introduce additional market-driven technologies.

B-SEP is being implemented under the Ministry of Education. Its overall objective is to achieve a better trained and qualified workforce for the key industrial sectors. It has a set target to support enhancement of capacity of the key government agencies in relation to technical institutes.

Another project named SEP-B is extending supports to private sector-led training programmes aligned with the skills needs of the RMG and construction sectors. The project, popularly known as 'Sudokkho', has two components to bring a systematic change in the labour market. They are supporting private training providers to offer affordable quality training that enhances employability and supports private-sector industries to develop and operate industry-led training facilities.

Blue Economy is an area which needs adequate skilled manpower to efficiently utilise the existing natural and mineral resources in the Bay of Bengal and its adjoining oceans. For long, the necessity to develop skilled manpower has been felt for harnessing the economic prospects of its maritime resources.

Due to absence of required technology and roadmap, the country is failing to tap its living and non-living marine resources. Marine experts have suggested working out some strategic plans to develop the country's capacity, both in terms of human resources and technological know-how, for harnessing its marine resources.

There is no denying that optimum utilisation of blue economy is very much essential to become more prosperous. Sea-related subjects like expansion of international trade, use of marine mineral resources for long-term energy security, proper management of marine fish resources and bio-diversity should determine Bangladesh's future

development and economic growth.

Although the country has an abundant stock of living and non-living resources available under the seabed and water column, there is a dearth of skilled manpower to ascertain the availability and explore its resources. As such, creating skilled manpower is just a need of the hour.

On the other hand, there is also lack of proper technology for exploiting deep sea fishes and sea-bed resources. This is an area where technology could turn the nation into a prosperous one through developing marine-based economic activities and management of sea and its resources.

Over the years, Bangladesh could produce only a handful of tech-savvy skilled personnel. Lack of proper planning and strategies is to blame. The end-result is very pathetic. The government and the private sector are being forced to hire skilled and tech-savvy manpower from abroad. Thus the country's precious foreign currency is being drained out.

It is surprising to note that Bangladesh is one of the largest remittance sources of India. It is hard to believe that the Indian expatriates, numbering over 500,000 now working in Bangladesh, sent home an estimated \$3.72 billion a year. Most of the Indians are working in the country's burgeoning RMG and textile industries as well as its numerous non-government organisations (NGOs).

It is high time now to create the country's domestic technical manpower. Its sovereign rights in the Bay, established through the verdicts of the international courts, have created scopes for exploring mineral resources from the sea-bed without any obstacle. Bangladesh secured maritime boundaries of 200 nautical miles through legal battles with Myanmar and India.

Blue economy can undeniably ensure sustainable development, taking into account the advantages of, and strategies for, managing the resources of the blue ocean. It is evident that blue economy demands coordinated efforts for conservation, utilisation and exploitation of related resources.

The government needs now to institutionalise the oceanography and also to strengthen the educational institutions for such studies. Harnessing of mineral and gas resources, as noted earlier, requires building of highly educated manpower.

Partnership between the government and private sector is critically important. Even in some cases, the private sector needs to play a more advanced role in exploiting the sea resources. The government should definitely remain at the helm, but it must work with the private sector and extend all possible help.

On its part, the government is committed to exploring the large potential of the sea and sea-resources through proper management to ensure the country's sustainable economic development efforts. To develop human resources and import technology to exploit the resources, there is a need for strong public-private partnership as well as collaboration with countries, having the right kind of expertise in the relevant fields.

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