

BKMEA training: lifeline to many

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Nupur's eyes glittered with dreams of living in Dhaka with her husband Noor Alam, as she had just completed training in sewing and knitting from the Payerabandh project of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA).

Her husband works in a garment factory in Dhaka Export Processing Zone. Nupur meets Alam once every three months when he comes home to Rangpur.

"I wanted to go to Dhaka earlier but my husband could not afford the living cost for two of us. So, I had to stay at my parent's home."

She joined the 45-day programme when she heard BKMEA is training unemployed men and women in her village.

"I'll be there in Dhaka within a week as BKMEA has already arranged a job for me at a garment factory there."

Another trainee, Selina, 45, who lives in Sathkhira, runs a family of two -- a daughter and a son -- as a single-mother. Her husband Sheikh Abul Hossain walked out on her and married another woman six years ago. Her daughter was married off last year and the son, a class-V student, lives in the daughter's house.

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke. "I hope my days of financial sufferings will come to an end. I'm going to join a garment factory soon." She pinned hopes on the training that made her ready for a new beginning in Dhaka, with her son.

Since its launch in 2008, BKMEA has trained 2,297



Women take part in a training programme organised by Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association at Payerabandh Memorial Complex in Rangpur.

women, mostly from northern districts, in knitting, sewing and quality control in 27 batches, said Abdur Razzak, BKMEA's Payerabandh project coordinator.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association has been providing jobs to these trained women in its 1,500 garment factories since the launch of the course, he said.

BKMEA provides all-out

support, including food and transport allowances to the trainees, Razzak added. "The organisation possesses every necessary machinery for the training."

Earlier, the programme had been meant for the people in *monga* regions that include Rangpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh.

"This news of training and job opportunities spread very fast all over the country and attracted many others," Razzak said.

The training is held at Payerabandh Memorial Complex, constructed in 1999. BKMEA appointed seven trainers for the trainees who live in dormitories inside the complex.

Even some graduates and

post-graduates also took part in the training and landed good jobs in the capital, said the Payerabandh coordinator.

"Each batch now contains nearly 100 students. If the government constructs another spacious room on the campus, we can accommodate up to 150 students in a batch."

There are many BKMEA-trained hands who are now working in different garment

factories in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Savar. Many of them are happy with their monthly earnings of around Tk 5,000. Only a few of them failed to adapt to the challenges outside their homes.

Another worker of Payerabandh union, preferring to be unnamed, said she came back from Dhaka over a fear of sexual harassment in workplace.

India's airlines spend big but airports are lacking

AFP, New Delhi

An upstart Indian carrier's \$15 billion order with Airbus is a bold bet on travel demand in the fast-growing country. But ageing airports and over-ambition could yet clip the industry's wings.

IndiGo, which was launched in 2005, on Wednesday stormed onto the international stage by announcing a deal for 180 new aircraft, the largest number of Airbus planes ever bought in a single order.

"We are putting our money where our mouth is," IndiGo president Aditya Ghosh boasted after sealing the deal at Airbus headquarters in Toulouse, southwest France.

"If the country has to grow by 9-10 percent, the airline business has to be an equal partner," he told the Mint daily newspaper. "There will be one or two years of up and down, but overall there will be only one direction."

The Airbus contract, he said, was worth "close to \$15 billion", less than the planes' total list price of \$15.6 billion, while a separate multi-billion-dollar engine order will follow.

The privately owned IndiGo is the rising star in the booming Indian industry, which saw passenger numbers leap 25 percent year on year in November.

Although the country remains deeply impoverished in many areas, its economic boom is elevating millions into the aspirational middle classes, and they are buying increasing quantities of consumer electronics, cars -- and flights.

to mean hours on cramped and noisy trains, but rising wages and the liberalisation of the airline market that began in the 1990s has led to new choices.

IndiGo is now the nation's third-largest carrier with 836,000 customers a month, according to November data from the aviation ministry, behind Jet Airways and Kingfisher but ahead of beleaguered state-run Air India.

But some industry experts urge caution, recalling that India's aviation sector has already made a false start, when an over-ambitious expansion a decade ago exposed major airlines to the

global downturn.

In 2009, Kingfisher, Jet and others begged unsuccessfully for a government bailout after suffering huge losses caused by high oil prices and over-capacity.

"Continued success will depend on a judicious balance of supply and demand in the market," according to Dinesh Keskar, the head of Indian operations for US planemaker Boeing.

"Two years ago, there were too many seats chasing too few passengers. Now, fares are at a level where airlines can make a profit."

India's economy has returned to annual growth levels of around 8.0-9.0 percent

which were the norm before the global financial crisis.

Passengers are buying more tickets, prompting upbeat carriers to hike fares as demand outstrips capacity.

Yet as airlines modernise and expand, analysts warn the nation's airports lag behind, threatening to drag the soaring aviation business back to earth.

"It's not just about inducting new aircraft to meet the growing air traffic demand," Mahantesh Sabarad from Mumbai-based Fortune Equity Brokers told AFP. "It's about runway capacity, and airport capacity."

"If adequate attention is

not given to build larger airports, IndiGo's plans may well be grounded."

New Delhi opened a 2.7-billion-dollar terminal in July last year, but Mumbai has been unable to relieve chronic congestion at its only airport, which is hemmed in by slums on three sides.

Environmental concerns, difficulties in relocating local people, corruption, the slow legal system and weak land acquisition legislation have meant proposals to build a second airport have been fought over for 10 years.

In November, the backers finally got the right to build a new airport among mangrove

trees on a plot southeast of the city of 18 million people.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), an industry lobby group, points to Mumbai as an example of the under-investment in infrastructure which has restricted traffic.

"Investments in the development of airport infrastructure have only been very recent," spokesman Albert Tjoeng told AFP.

IndiGo, meanwhile, is expected to continue to invest.

Analysts say it might go public and offer shares later this year and new international routes to regional countries are expected to follow.

Ageing China offers silver lining for investors

REUTERS, Shanghai/Beijing

Retired professor Chen Chongyu and his wife Liu Zhenjuan dreamed of coming back to China from their daughter's home in France, but until last year the couple had nowhere to go.

That changed when they found Cherish-Yearn, an upscale retirement community on the fringes of Shanghai and a pioneer in catering to China's prosperous elderly.

Businesses are just starting to tap the rapidly expanding senior citizens' market -- China's new silver industry.

"Every year we would come back to China, and we would visit retirement homes. But we couldn't find anything," said 79-year-old Chen, a history professor who specialised in the French revolution.

"When we finally found this place we felt we could return."

China's traditional model of children living with their elderly parents is under siege, thanks to 30 years of the one-child policy and rapid urban migration.

Leaving their daughter's home in France, Liu, 74, and Chong paid 690,000 yuan to move into a three-room apartment.

An annual fee of 88,000 yuan covers basic medical and cleaning services, and various activities.

China had 169 million people over 60 by the end of 2009, or 12 percent of the population. That number will jump to 250 million people by 2025.

And their spending power is rising. Chinese senior citizens command about 300 billion to 400 billion yuan in annual disposable income, according to Kunal Sinha, chief knowledge officer of



The tail section of an Air India Airbus A320 aircraft (R) is seen on the tarmac of the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi.