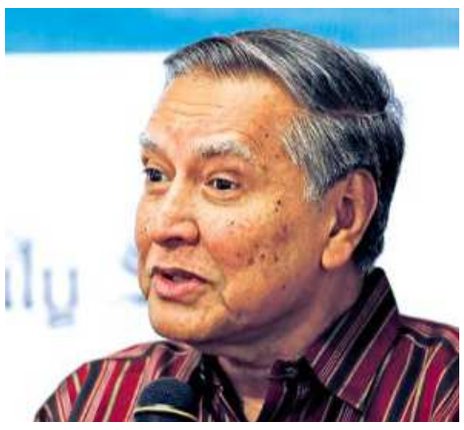
# Life skills for a better tomorrow

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

*With an objective to reinforce the importance of soft-skills in employment, a roundtable discussion titled, "Life Skills for Progress and Prosperity- the Youth's Narrative" was jointly organised by IPDC Finance and the Daily Star on August 7, 2019 at the Daily Star Centre, Dhaka. Over 20 discussants from different sectors attended the programme. The discussion, which observed International Youth Day 2019 (August 12), brought to light many important matters, including gaps in the formal academic system when it comes to equipping the county's youth with developmental professional proficiency and the essentiality of skills training for the youth. The discussion was moderated by Elita Karim.*



### MAHFUZ ANAM
**Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star**

Discover your strengths and build on them. Simultaneously, find your weaknesses and work to eliminate them. Identify yourself first and explore the section that makes you happy. If you are aware of your strengths, only then you can pass on your energy and positivity to others.
For me, the world is inhabited by two types of people—the talkers and the doers. I urge you take the doers side. You can be overwhelmed by opportunities or you can be weighed down by challenges. The choice is yours to make, but never forget that you are the reservoirs of the country. Be self-confident but never be self-centered and you shall make way to prosperity.

### ELITA KARIM
**Editor, Arts & Entertainment and Star Youth, The Daily Star**

Learn Unbound -- A life skills enhancement initiative by The Daily Star, in association with IPDC Finance limited, will soon start its journey. As we all have been or are working with youths for quite a lot of time, I believe this friendly discussion will unlock many other aspects and help us come up with a better platform for the youths today.

### TASMIAH T RAHMAN
**Head of Programme of Skills Development, BRAC**

In Bangladesh, parents' financial situation determine which school a child will go to, which is unfortunate. Women, differently abled and transgender people face many hardships, too, when it comes to education and employment. From my experience of working with underprivileged youths, aged 14 to 30, who cannot access formal or technical education, the technical or vocational needs of each young person varies. In a recent discussion about life skills, I came across a child from an underprivileged background, who asked, "Who is thinking about developing my life skills or technical skills, where am I in this fourth industrial revolution?" I sadly did not have the answer to those questions. However, I think this gap is due to the existing class differences in our society. We want our children to be successful, but we do to teach them to cope up with stress. We also tend to criminalise every mistake a child makes, instead of trying to figure out the root of the problems to help them overcome these shortcomings.

### MOMINUL ISLAM
**Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, IPDC Finance**

Students in Bangladesh are missing the willingness to learn. Rather than obsessing over passing exams and receiving certificates, we should prioritise becoming lifelong learners. Critical thinking, collaborating and reflecting on the things that you have learnt, rather than memorising texts can help overcome such shortcomings.

### SURAYA JAHAN
**Head, Education and Skills Programme, British Council**

Employees hardly stay put in one job for life. Transferrable skills, such as communication, adaptability, and flexibility are important when it comes to switching careers. Both academics and co-curricular activities play central roles in learning such skills. Parents and teachers play the most important roles when it comes to acquiring such skills as they are the primary learning sources for every child.

### BIPASHA HOSSAIN
**Head, Strategy and Organisational Development, BYLC**

BYLC works with English medium, Bangla medium and Madrasa medium students. We believe in equipping the youth with 21st century skills, such as leadership, communication and creative thinking among others.

### SHUVASHISH ROY
**Digital Marketing Manager, The Daily Star**

Thinking innovatively, adaptability and the willingness for continuous upgrading is essential when it comes to life skills in the new creative economy. To that end, the present generation can use social media platforms as great learning resources.

### MUHAMMED SOHEL IQBAL
**Mohammed Sohel Iqbal, EducationUSA Director, Public Affairs Section, US Embassy**

In the USA, after completing high school, many students start their tertiary level education in two-year institutions called community colleges, which usually have close links to community groups and local employers. These colleges offer programmes that are a blend of knowledge and skill, covering technical and vocational education, and enabling learners to move directly to employment sectors. I believe that skill development should come from the roots of education and we all know that investments in education have multiplier effects. We gladly see that an increasing number of Bangladeshi youths each year are going abroad for quality education and also returning to Bangladesh to lead their initiatives – they are actually contributing to the nation building. On the other hand, education essentially is a continuous and lifelong process, and there are no alternatives to keeping the learning curve steep and gaining new skills.

### SAKIB BIN RASHID
**Deputy Manager, BRAC Education Project and Chief Instructor, 10 Minute School**

I would like to emphasise on the concept of edutainment technology, through which people can learn skills from materials that are intended to be both educational and fun. Given that nowadays, people like using their smart phones and social media platforms, we at 10 Minute School are coming up with a platform where people can learn skills such as writing resumes and cover letters, through apps.

### JAWAAD BIN HAMID
**Human Resource Business Partner, DHL Express**

The youths are crippled when it comes to employability because our education system does not analyse the needs of every child. Intervention at the right age is important.

### MD SOHAN HAIDEAR
**CEO, Smartifier Academy**

I might be a progressive thinker and run a successful company, but speaking of prosperity and progress, I think peace is equally important as we live in a country where empathy and tolerance is missing.

### ARIF ZAMAN
**Director of Academic Affairs, Canadian University of Bangladesh**

I believe that the education system fails to provide quality education only because of its educators. Moreover, if we study the current student population, we will find them to be from diverse backgrounds. Thus, I disagree with the education curriculum that is pillared on a 'one size fits all' basis, and only meets the requirements of a homogeneous student body.

### AYMAN SADIQ
**CEO, 10 Minute School**

If we really dig deep into the shortcomings of the earning population, we see how the education system fails to provide graduates with basic skills. University students and immigrants, who are the prime earning sources of our economy, cannot access basic skills which can help them maximise their income.

### GHULAM SUMDANY DON
**Chief Inspirational Officer, Don Sumdany Facilitation**

Being in Dhaka and actually being able to work with the privileged at our centre, we fail to see the reality in the rural areas where the majority of our population resides. When we group different people into clusters according to their institutions, we are actually putting them into distinct boxes and drawing lines between them. Thus, empathy, communication, and team effort fails.

### ZARIF ENAM
**Assistant Manager, Social Innovation Lab, BRAC**

Collaborating with others, and working as a team is very important. Learning by actions rather than theories is more creative and can lead to an environment which can inspire others to think creatively as well.

### MOHAMMAD MAHBOOB RAHMAN
**AVP and Chief Staff, BRAC University**

In terms of the demographic dividend, we see that only 10 percent of our population is employable, however, when these people migrate overseas, they are employed. Unfortunately, we would be hard pressed to find people who actually want to become primary teachers and readily accept jobs in the north-eastern districts of Bangladesh. For there to be skilled students, there needs to be people who are willing to teach them those skills.

### WALI UL ISLAM
**Project Manager for Route to Market, British American Tobacco Bangladesh**

Life is not supposed to be fair-- accepting that will only lead you towards progress. The question every employer asks is, 'Is the person sitting in front of me functional while stepping out of his/her comfort zone?' Employers mainly look for people who are willing to get out of their comfort zone and deal with different situations.

### ASIF ISLAM ABIR
**Founder and President, Jiboner Jonno Rokto**

While social media can be addicting, it can play a central role in the country's development. I run Jiboner Jonno Rokto, an online non-profit organisation that helps link up patients who require blood with healthy donors, mostly during urgency. Currently we have over 7,000 registered donors.

### SOURAV SAHA
**Senior Program Officer, Jaago Foundation's Youth Development Programme**

In our training programme we found that the under-represented youths lacked vision due to financial limitations and that most youths tend to opt for jobs that do not complement their academic degrees. However, youths could overcome such shortcomings through consultation.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED & PIYAS BISWAS