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Skill ecosystem for progressive skills economy in Bangladesh

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Government TVET institutes (i.e. TSCs, TTCs) and TVET institutes run by reputed private organisations like UCEP Bangladesh, MAWTS etc. have to play vital roles, both in the apex body and as an implementing agency to promote coordinated role in the ecosystem.

One of the integral yet challenging part of the skill ecosystem would be the informal skills sector, which has been ignored for years, though 87 percent of the total industrial contribution to the GDP comes from this particular sector in Bangladesh. Moreover, it has been playing a major role in generating employment, which is significantly valuable from a social economic aspect.

The informal sector requires meaningful investment and systematic approach in four different aspects. These are: (i) regional focus and planning for a comprehensive program to promote value chain system on priority sub-sectors; (ii) expanded opportunity for non-formal skills training through a standard

framework; (iii) formal certification and wage matrix; and (iv) entrepreneurship and business promotion support through active engagement of financial agencies and relevant authorities.

The 21st century looks for competent workforce, preferably with IT and automation skills, and not just labour. Hence, skill ecosystem would focus on integrating soft skills as a fundamental requirement for continuous ups-kills, and adopt technologies related to 4IR, which would be the focus of excellence to address rapidly changing scenario in the global skill economy. The latter demands higher-level skill-mix to enable the workforce to engage in innovation, improve the quality of products and services, and even improve the whole value chain system.

Bangladesh is inclined to tune all positive efforts for skill economy where regional skill ecosystem would play a vital role to help the young generation develop as a progressive, productive, responsive, and competitive workforce.

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Preparing Bangladesh for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

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In fact, if we go back to the Cisco Digital Readiness Index 2019, we can see that Bangladesh ranked 118th for people, and if we look into the Network Readiness Index (NRI) 2020 by the Portulans Institute, we will see that the rank for people is 115th. These two indicators tell us that whatever we are doing to produce skilled resources for 4IR or the technology sector is not working. This calls for the government to rethink and establish a mechanism/body that will dedicatedly work to ensure the supply of skilled resources, provide guidelines to reduce the demand-supply issues, bring academia and businesses closer and reskill/upskill the existing resources with appropriate skills.

The most talked-about part of the 4IR is the physical infrastructure to support the adoption and growth of the technologies. Hence the revolution needs R&D centres and knowledge-based technology-specific hubs to be established that can lead the development of home-grown technologies and collaborate with pioneering innovators globally to develop practical solutions to business problems. Along with these, the requirements for high-speed internet connectivity throughout the country will significantly increase. In the last four years, we have progressed considerably in ensuring broadband connectivity at the district levels. Still, to ensure the full benefit of 4IR, we will require high-speed internet connectivity at the union/village levels. The positive thing is that the government has undertaken multiple projects, and it seems that in the next few years, broadband connectivity will improve significantly in rural areas. Another essential part will be to have robust data centres that can support the government requirements and serve the businesses. It will be crucial to engage the global leaders in cloud storage like

Amazon, Microsoft, and Google to develop data centres in Bangladesh. If they are not interested in developing data centres, establishing collaborations with them to develop the local capacity will be the alternative. The government has already established Tier 4 and Tier 3 data centres, and their capacity has increased significantly. However, to realise the benefits of 4IR, these physical establishments need to be on par with their international counterparts in terms of services offered and their quality. Another salient aspect of 4IR is 5G connectivity. 4IR will be launched on the 5G platform. The implementation of 5G will enable businesses to access high-speed data transfer on the go. So, ensuring 5G is offered at an affordable cost may become one of the necessary prerequisites of the 4IR.

Finally, we must recognise that the 4IR is looming just around the corner. It is a grave concern that we might get caught unprepared in some areas. To prepare for the 4IR, Bangladesh's approach needs to be holistic. It is too big of a challenge to be tackled by one ministry or agency. The 4IR will impact not only the IT industry, but also education, agriculture, manufacturing, health, economy, services, and many other areas. This is a challenge of global magnitude, and all the ministries need to collaborate to ensure that they are doing their part to make Bangladesh ready to ride the wave. At the same time, it is also falling on the shoulders of the businesses and trade bodies to do their part by engaging the government to create a win-win situation for everyone. These are uncertain times, and the pandemic has accelerated the pace of 4IR as dependency on technology has increased very quickly. Thus, the speed of the readiness of Bangladesh needs to accelerate to ensure we are fully prepared when the time comes.

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