

THE BUSINESS STANDARD

Skill project creates jobs in steel mills, shipyards at home and abroad

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT - BANGLADESH

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After completing his higher secondary education, Abdul Moti Masum was looking for a job to support his family. Having no technical skill, he was having trouble finding one. Then Masum came to learn from a friend that there is a course that provides technical training along with a stipend.

He got admitted to a three-month-long welding fabrication course at ABC Bangladesh-Turkish Technical School in Fatickchhari in Chattogram in 2019. After completing the course, he obtained the DNV-GL certificate (Det Norske Veritas-Germanischer Lloyd), which is a Norwegian and German firm approved certification of international standards under the international classification society.

With the certificate in hand, Masum left

for Saudi Arabia by self-finance in 2020, where the certificate helped him to get a job at Aramco – the state-owned energy giant of the kingdom.

Masum's father Hefez Mohammad Elias said, as the eldest sibling, his son always tried to support the family, for which the skills he developed in the course really helped.

Seeing the success of Masum, his younger brother Abdul Majid is also now receiving training at the same school. Majid told The Business Standard that the skill development training gives him hope. He is also planning to go abroad for a job after completing his training.

Shanta Akhter, another trainee who received learned skills on machine tools operation, now works at Abul Khair Steel (AKS Steel) – one of the largest steel manufacturing companies in Bangladesh.

She told TBS, "It was very difficult for my father to provide

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enough food for our seven-member family with his little income. After completing my secondary education, I was desperately looking for a job to help my father.”

“Then the training changed my life. It helped me get a job at a big company like AKS Steel. Now, I work as a shift-in-charge at the company,” Shanta boasted.

“I feel relieved that I can help my family now,” she said gleefully.

In 2016, the finance ministry, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the Association of Export Oriented Shipbuilding Industries of Bangladesh, introduced a project titled “Skills for Employment Investment Program” (SEIP) that changed the lives of thousands.

The students didn’t have to pay for the course as it was funded by the finance ministry and ADB.

Many SEIP graduates have found lucrative jobs in big companies at home and abroad, while some have become entrepreneurs.

A total of 15,570 unskilled workers, including 960 women, have been trained under the SEIP programme, turning them into skilled workers for shipbuilding and other

technical industries.

Of the total trained workers, 12,617 got certified, and 8,576 were placed for jobs in local companies. Another 203 were placed at different shipyards in Oman, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE and Malaysia by the training institute in the last seven years.

Engineer Sakhawat Hossain, general secretary of shipbuilders’ association, said that realising the prospects of the industry, the government in 2016 took up the time-befitting decision of setting up the SEIP training programme. The initiative was aimed at preparing a highly skilled workforce that was of international level.

At present, fewer than 10,000 skilled workers are employed at various shipbuilding yards whereas the actual market demand is well above 20,000, Hossain said.

For building ships, workers from six trades are required, Chief Coordinator of SEIP Capt M Habibur Rahman told The Business Standard. These include Welding & Fabrication, Machine Tools Operation, Electrical & Navigation Equipment Installation Machinery Installation, Ship Painting, and Ship Piping.

“A total of 29 institutions in different districts of the country were assigned to enroll and train unskilled workers in these six trades”, he said. Among the trades, Welding & Fabrication was designed as an international standard course which is evaluated by international organisations such as DNV-GL and Bureau VERITAS.

With the international recognition of the course, it became easier for its graduates to get lucrative foreign jobs in companies and earn handsome amounts of foreign currencies for themselves and the country, he added.

The students also got safety training which reduces the number of accidents in the industry, Capt Habib said.

“Recently, we could not meet the demand of 400 skilled welders that came from two companies from Korea and Malaysia due to their requirement of more upgraded welders than we train up in our three-month course”, the chief coordinator said.

Therefore, the authority has already taken steps to upgrade training courses by June next according to the requirements provided by the

two companies, he added.

Regarding the future of the training programme, Capt Habib said they are planning to include one more trade named Marine Diesel Engine Artificer. “As we do not have any skilled workers in this trade, we are planning to train up to 120 workers initially and the course is scheduled to launch this month.”

Mentioning the success story of the programme’s female trainees, Capt Habib said, they are contributing to their families and locality, while some have taken up the initiative to train other women in their neighbourhood and inspire them to contribute to society.”

The programme has already completed two tranches between 2016 and 2021. An agreement for the third tranche was signed in January 2022, which will end in December 2023.

In the first tranche, a total of 7,328 trainees were enrolled, of which 6,164 got certified and 4,786 got job placements. In the second tranche, of the total 5,000 trainees, 4,467 got certified and 3,060 got job placements.

The third tranche has a budget of Tk 3 crore to train up 6,000 more.