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Row over control delays NSDA formation

Higher skills seen urgent to match MIC

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A row over jurisdiction has stalled the creation of an authority to administer skills improvement to support country's productive and development activities on a higher scale, officials said.

Two key ministries, they said, are at loggerheads over the matter. The tussle between finance ministry's finance division and the ministry of labour and employment has generated frustration among those who are dealing with the authority formation.

They feel that the dilemmas will cause delay in starting its function that is important for raising skills supportive of activities of a country that aspires to become a middle-income country (MIC) by 2021.

The finance division wants the new authority to function under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) or creation of a separate division to run it.

But the Ministry of Labour and Employment has a different view. "Since the issue relates to skills development, any regulatory authority should be under the Ministry of Labour and Employment," said State Minister for Labour and Employment Mr Mujibul Haque, when contacted by the FE Friday evening.

In the meantime, a committee headed by cabinet secretary Shafiul Alam is now scrutinising the matter as directed by the Prime Minister. The committee will now decide the functional modalities.

The government took the move to create the regulatory authority that would oversee skill-development activities in the country in a coordinated manner.

As per the concept paper, the authority will coordinate and harmonise skill-development efforts of the government and the private sector.

Currently, Bangladesh lacks such a regulatory authority, resulting in poor quality of certification.

Styled National Skill Development Authority (NSDA), it will ensure standards of skill development through effective regulation of vocational education and training courses in the country.

The NSDA will ensure training on skills that are in demand both at home and abroad and thus help increase the volume of remittances the country receives from expatriates.

Currently, India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries have such specialised bodies on promoting skills in keeping with needs of the fast-changing global developments.

An organisation named Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) under the Ministry of Education is now partly doing similar functions, but it is not authorised to prepare curriculum for training courses, supervise and monitor different training programmes.

The Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP), a project under the Ministry of Finance, has made the move for establishing NSDA.

A South African consultant, Alastir, prepared details on its organogram and functions.

They have planned to launch this Authority sometime in 2018 as it will require a law to be passed by parliament.

"We're really frustrated over the developments as it will delay functioning of the Authority," said one official familiar with the matter.

He said they wanted to set up the body either under the PMO or a separate division.

"The labour and employment ministry will actually not do anything meaningful for the Authority," he said.

Abdur Rouf Talukder, executive project director at the SEIP, told the FE that Bangladesh has no such organisation although almost all developing countries have got it long before for skill development.

The new organisation is expected to help promote skills in the country to newer heights-as low or unskilled labour is less productive and earns lower wages at home and abroad.

Currently 23 ministries are providing skill-development training through their affiliated directorates. But there is no regulatory organisation to monitor such training.

The government has allocated Tk 1.74 billion in the ongoing fiscal year for imparting skills training under the 23 ministries/divisions.

People at the SEIP said Bangladesh has a huge skills gap at different levels. But at mid and high levels, the gaps are acute.

They said due to skill shortages at both technical and managerial levels, about 200,000 foreigners are working particularly in the readymade garment sector to contribute to manufacturing, production and marketing.

They said annual take-home salaries and allowances of foreign workers stand at more than US\$5.0 billion as per different documents.

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