

Myanmar to Focus on Education and Skills Training for its Young Workforce

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- Myanmar is ready to go to work, but it needs local and international involvement to educate its people
- Japan and India are among the countries at the forefront of this effort, with the Japan International Cooperation Agency signing a US\$ 500 million grant
- Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi calls for quick wins in vocational training
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Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 7 June 2013 – Myanmar is open for business, but it needs local and international help to train and educate its people, a panel told participants at the World Economic Forum on East Asia in Myanmar. “We are ready to help,” said Hiroto Arakawa, Vice-President, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan.

JICA is signing an agreement with Myanmar to extend US\$ 500 million in aid for “quick-fix type power projects” in the Yangon area and education and other development programmes among the country’s ethnic groups. Japan will also provide loans to build infrastructure in a new special economic zone in Myanmar and open a vocational training centre in August.

For its part, India is helping set up the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology in Mandalay, patterned after the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology system, which has produced some of the world’s top engineers and scientists. “The first batch of students will be admitted in September this year,” said Subramanian Ramadorai, Vice-Chairman, Tata Consultancy Services, India, and Co-Chair of the World Economic Forum on East Asia. The school will train thousands of IT specialists in four or five years.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Chairman of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Member of Parliament from Kawhmu Constituency, Myanmar, stressed the need for vocational training as well. “We suffered from a very bad education system for many decades,” she said. “Many people in their forties are not equipped for gainful employment and it is not easy for them to go back to formal education.” Vocational education is the quickest way to give them the skills to find jobs.

She also made an appeal for JICA and other organizations to include a training and education component in all their programmes in Myanmar. “When you help either in the form of development programmes or humanitarian programmes, I want the people involved to gain skills so that they earn and they learn,” she said. “We don’t want our road workers to remain at the level of road work. Give us the skills to solve our own humanitarian and development problems ourselves.”

Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala II, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Ayala Corporation, Philippines, noted that his country is in a similar situation as Myanmar in terms of its young population. The youth must be equipped with thinking and creative skills and expertise, not rote learning, he said. Giving the example of the US\$ 15 billion business process outsourcing (BPO)

industry in the Philippines, he urged harnessing the private sector to help develop new sectors and create jobs.

“Business can help create new models with academia,” he said. In the case of the BPO sector, the private sector formed an industry association and leveraged the combined influence of its members to persuade schools to equip students with computer skills and fluency in English, which are essential for BPO work. Today, nearly 800,000 jobs have been created in the new industry, staffed mostly by young people.

Over 1,000 participants from 55 countries are taking part in the World Economic Forum on East Asia, held for the first time in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. The meeting welcomes over 100 public figures representing 15 countries, including heads of state or government from Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam. More than 550 business leaders, over 60 Global Growth Companies and nearly 300 young leaders from the Forum’s Young Global Leaders and Global Shapers communities, together with other members of civil society, academia and media are convening to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Myanmar and East Asia.

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