**Industry-driven workforce**

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Pakistan has a burgeoning population, with a major youth bulge that needs jobs, which could only be created in an economy that is growing at a healthy rate. On the contrary, our economy is shrinking and most of the value-added items are imported, while our dwindling exports consist of low-value-added items in low-value sectors such as textile, sports goods, and surgical instruments. Over the last few decades, the country has suffered from massive de-industrialisation, with money pouring into real estate and the bullion market. Amid this perennial economic crisis, there has been no consistent economic and technology policy. Resultantly, our reliance on imported goods only increased and the present economic scenario-where we don’t even have the dollars to import essential items bears testimony to the decades of mismanagement by successive governments.

In the present quagmire, there are a multitude of suggestions as to how to arrest the economic and technological downfall. There are suggestions for improving digital skills to tap foreign markets, just as India and China did. However, there are no suggestions as to how we will enter into these markets where India is already dominating. Similarly, there are voices for improving productivity, and workforce skills through training, and workshops. Various government agencies such as NAVTTC, TEVTA, and TUSDEC are ‘vigorously’ designing courses for the workforce. However, again, all these voices and suggestions do not mention the technology they are targeting, because most of the technologies being employed in our industry are either obsolete or near obsolesce. The websites of these government agencies tell a rosy picture of the number of apprentices trained, and training packages developed and delivered, thus indicating a healthy, vibrant, expanding industrial base which is absorbing these new apprentices equipped with their designed skills. But factually, the industrial base is dwindling, and exports are plummeting, thus negatively affecting the workforce employed or required. |In sum, the picture painted by government agencies does not dovetail with the facts on the ground.

[Minister for Industries and Production calls on PM in Islamabad](https://www.nation.com.pk/31-Mar-2023/minister-for-industries-and-production-calls-on-pm-in-islamabad)

The argument is for the revival and upgradation of the industrial base and aligning the workforce training accordingly. Identifying the markets, and industries for upgrading and accordingly training the workforce would create a synergy and alignment which has been missed in debates. This would help to develop an all-encompassing industrial policy. This begs the question of how the industry could be revived: what could be the catalyst or stimulus for reviving our industrial base? CPEC is the best thing that has happened to Pakistan in some time. China needed access to the Arabian sea for its trade, and Pakistan provides the shortest land route, saving China billions of dollars in logistics.

However, Pakistan has failed to benefit from the CPEC so far, for one reason or the other. The first phase of CPEC related to infrastructure has been completed. Now the second stage, which among others, consists of setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) along the CPEC is in progress. Pakistan should enter into an agreement with China and other interested parties willing to populate SEZs about the type and technological level of industries to be set up in SEZs. These industries should be mandated to bring better value-added processes and products and new sectoral technologies into Pakistan. Further, the entire skilled workforce, except top management, is hired locally. Further, the local industry should be the upstream partner of all the firms in SEZs. Only, such an integrated approach will help upgrade local industry, improve the skills of the workforce and generate employment for the local youth and thus help uplift the economy. Any other approach to CPEC will render Pakistan merely a toll collector on a passage that is passing through its territory.