**Cyber Highway to Prosperity**

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The resourceful, enterprising, and technologically savvy young generation of Pakistan has always been capable of devising creative and innovative ways to generate income for themselves, their families, and the country as a whole. They have, through their demonstrated creativity, entrepreneurship, and tenacity, devised a workable solution to circumvent the unemployment in the country, and while living in the comfort of their homes and surrounded by the warmth and love of their mothers and dears ones, they are able to ride on the cyberspace to find for themselves highly lucrative jobs for developed countries and corporations that rarely require a college degree and instead evaluate candidates based on their dexterity.

The IT sector is currently one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in Pakistan. The sector is projected to contribute $15 billion to the economy by 2025, up from US$ 2.1 billion in 2022, representing 1% of the GDP, with the number of IT human resources in Pakistan expected to reach 1.5 million by this year (2023).

A variety of factors are driving growth in the IT sector, including increased demand for IT services from both domestic and international businesses, which is opening up a variety of opportunities for IT professionals in areas such as software development, web development, mobile development, and data science, as well as in the banking, finance, healthcare, telecommunications, manufacturing, and e-commerce sectors. To capitalize on these new opportunities, the Pakistani government has put in place several legislative initiatives to stimulate the IT sector, including the formation of the National IT Board, the introduction of tax exemptions for IT companies, and the allocation of funding for IT education and training. As a result of the establishment of several universities and colleges, as well as several commercial IT training institutes, IT professionals in a variety of fields have been developed to capitalize on the hungry and ever-growing IT Sector.

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The technologically savvy young generation has successfully created a cyberspace motorway for themselves by utilizing online platforms where startups and a large and growing pool of skilled IT professionals offer their services to clients all over the world by avoiding cumbersome procedures, protocols, and tedious and never-ending laws and regulations of Pakistan’s sluggish system. They are exploiting cyber space highways with complete freedom, conducting a massive amount of business by selling their skills, expertise, and time to foreign buyers who are clamouring to take advantage of high-quality IT services at reasonable prices without incurring any overhead costs of maintaining offices or renting office spaces, paying utility charges, transportation costs, and paying regular salaries to regular employees. Depending on the agreement and availability of online fund management businesses in Pakistan, these graduates are paid online, directly into their bank accounts, in foreign money or local currency. They typically have the option of keeping their hard-earned funds in foreign financial institutions or transferring them to Pakistani banks.

A new generation of young IT graduates and non-graduates is making a lot of money and lifting their families and the country out of poverty. Among the various online freelancing sites with particular specialities and uses depending on the field of competence and the type of work are Upwork, Freelancer, Fiverr, Guru, PeoplePerHour, Toptal, 99designs, SimplyHired, FlexJobs, and LinkedIn Profinder. Each of these platforms has its own set of features, pricing systems, and job categories, as well as a modest referral fee for referring services.

Pakistan’s global cyberspace trade and commerce superhighway is quickly increasing. Small merchants and entrepreneurs are turning to online platforms to solve some of the challenges that they face in traditional enterprises and to open up new growth potential. The prospectus is not only optimistic but also revolutionary, due to increased internet and mobile phone usage, as well as the availability of e-commerce platforms and marketplaces. In Pakistan, the e-commerce sector has created job opportunities in logistics, warehousing, and customer service, prompting the government to launch a national e-commerce policy in 2019 to provide a framework for the sector’s growth, including measures to address key challenges such as payment systems, logistics, and digital infrastructure.

We still have a long way to go before we can be considered an effective and vital player in global IT exports, as we lag behind our immediate neighbour India and many other countries worldwide. India’s IT services exports hit a new high of USD 420 billion in FY23, up from USD 255 billion in FY22. In FY23, the country’s share in worldwide computer services exports climbed to 11%. India had over 4.5 million IT experts as of March 2023, making it one of the world’s major suppliers of IT services. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro, HCL Technologies, and Tech Mahindra are India’s top five IT exporters. These firms employ over 2 million IT specialists and earn more than USD 200 billion in revenue annually. Rising demand for cloud computing and other IT-enabled services, as well as an increasing number of multinational corporations setting up shop in India, are all fueling the expansion of India’s IT services sector. India’s top five export markets for IT services are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Canada. However, when compared to many other countries, India ranks worst. In terms of IT exports, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Singapore are rated first, second, and third in the world, respectively, whereas India is ranked 43rd and Pakistan is ranked 104th. (Source: www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/information\_technology\_exports/)

Unfortunately, we are overloading our education system with irrelevant subjects at all levels, consuming the majority of students’ time and energy, when we need to transform our school system from the ground up by introducing fundamentals of computer science, programming languages, data structures, algorithms, and operating systems. In addition to Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), IT consulting, data entry, web development and design, and mobile app development, it should encompass networking, database management, and software development. In addition, they should be taught mathematics for problem-solving and logical reasoning, as well as English as a communication tool. It should also cover topics like cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics, which is the process of extracting insights from massive databases.

Aside from traditional degree courses, the education system should also provide diploma courses of different duration based on the level of study. to significantly increase the number of IT professionals by establishing new institutions and utilizing online, home education, and hybrid education systems to exponentially increase the number of skilled and qualified IT professionals in relevant areas of IT expertise, as well as establishing a system to assist qualified professionals in finding jobs in areas of their skills and abilities.

Having said that, the global IT sector, which is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.9% from 2023 to 2027, offers tremendous opportunities for Pakistan only if we are ready, fully geared, have applied a futuristic approach, improved infrastructure, provided hassle-free access to finance, and rapidly created a state-of-the-art IT education and training system including formal, online, home education, and hybrid systems. With these initiatives, Pakistan’s IT sector may become a vital driver of growth, and job creation, and a worldwide IT market leader.

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