

Asian Age, Mumbai
February 28, 2011

Corporate technical education to fuel growth

meanwhile

P. Rajendran

THE RECENTLY-ANNOUNCED move for corporatisation of technical education is a welcome step to fill up the shortfall expected in trained manpower to enable India achieve the desired sustainable rate of growth of eight to nine per cent. The government will now allow the corporate sector to start AICTE-approved courses in separate companies set up as not-for-profit entities. As of now, only trusts can establish technical institutes. This move clearly falls in line with government's vision of a formidable target of 21 per cent gross enrolment ratio in higher education by 2017, that is, a jump of almost 100 per cent. The human resources development ministry has taken up the challenging task of transforming the education sector through various reforms with a clear vision of expansion, inclusion and quality.

Over the years, real public sector spending on higher education has been declining, and the private sector already accounts for 40 per cent of this segment. The government's main focus is on increasing the spread of elementary and secondary education, and rightly so. In such a scenario, the private sector — increasingly the beneficiaries of the output of tertiary education institutions — will now be required to play an even bigger role in higher education.

India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. We have over 400

The government will now allow the corporate sector to start AICTE-approved courses in separate companies set up as not-for-profit entities. As of now, only trusts can establish technical institutes.

universities, 22,000 colleges and over 1,200 engineering institutions. As of now, nearly 10 million children are engaged in pursuing higher education, but this translates into a gross enrolment ratio of just over 12 per cent. This is woefully below the same ratio in developed countries (over 50 per cent) and the global standard average (23 per cent).

To meet the 21 per cent gross enrolment ratio, we need many more institutes than we have at present, which can now be filled in by the private sector; and these could even be set up in the public-private partnership and build-operate-transfer models.

The National Knowledge Commission and the Yash Pal Committee have estimated that the country requires at least 1,000 more universities and 10,000 more colleges.

The numbers will increase; simultaneously, the quality of the institutes also needs to be benchmarked and contin-

uously improved, which would include attracting and training of high-calibre teachers. Accreditation standards need to be set, more bridge courses are required and technology needs to be deployed in a much more meaningful manner.

Today's challenges of quality in Indian higher education are inability to attract a sufficiently large number of talented youth to teach and do research, separation of education from research, inadequate financing and administrative weaknesses and wasteful expenditure.

India's rapid economic growth in the past two decades can be largely attributed to investments made in education in the previous 50 years.

But a lot of ground still needs to be covered and can be gauged by the fact that on the Human Development Index, as per the 2010 report of the United Nations Development Programme, India ranks 119 out of a total of 169 countries. It falls in the category of medium human development, much below China, which ranks 83, and below even countries like Guatemala (116), Kyrgyzstan (109) and Honduras (106). While the number of institutes is growing, there is no commensurate rise in the availability of teachers. With its inability to attract even the top one per cent of each year's class into Ph.D. programmes, the quality of instruction and scholarship in Indian higher education is often seen as set



for decline.

The new regulations will also facilitate the spread of technical education in under-represented areas.

In the current scenario, only 5.7 per cent people in rural areas study beyond secondary level and only 17 per cent people in urban areas do so. The country's higher education market is valued at around \$20 billion, and another \$20 billion investment is required in the

next 10 to 12 years!

A forthcoming CII white paper, "Discovering New Models of Increasing Private Participation in Higher Education", will address

issues like quantification of investments required in higher education in the short, medium and long term, identification of sources of funds, the level of private participation required, and will also look at examples from other

countries that have a high level of private investment in education. Some other issues which need to be addressed by the government are to look at existing modes of funding in higher education, leveraging existing investment vehicles like infrastructure bonds and other funding agencies like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, implementation and monitoring of investments, leveraging

technology to ameliorate the problem, new fields and disciplines of education that need to be addressed. But the first step has definitely been taken, and this will lead to more seats in engineering and management streams, and help bridge the rural-urban divide.

P. Rajendran is co-chairman of CII's education council and chief operating officer of NIIT Ltd