

# India as the world's skilled labour hub

It's a long journey for the National Skill Development Mission to create globally competitive talent



PREETI MEHRA

Skilling the youth is the new buzzword in the government, and all the experts agree that it clearly needs a more skilled approach to implement what has been drawn up in a policy paper. It was roughly a year ago the government rejigged the UPA's Skill India policy to announce the National Skill Development Mission with a mandate to train 300 million Indians by 2022.

The good news is the programme has been chugging along. But it requires a substantial amount of tweaking to actively push towards the goals.

The task, no doubt, is a humongous one. The government has estimated an incremental requirement of 110 million additional skilled personnel across 24 sectors, with the highest demand coming in from sectors such as retail, security, real estate, transport, beauty, health and wellness.

These numbers may sound overawing but is not surprising considering the demographic reality of the country. As much as 50 per cent of the population is below 27 years and 700 million in this age group will constitute part of the national population in 2020. That means that the task at hand cannot be taken lightly as a routine work in progress.

### Quality matters

It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who drew up the broad contours of the Skill Development Mission last year. Envisaging India as the "world's human resource capital" he said that the country should ready itself to replace the diminishing workforce in other

countries. This means we must ready our human resources to cater to the global market and that necessarily entails a greater stress on the quality of training imparted.

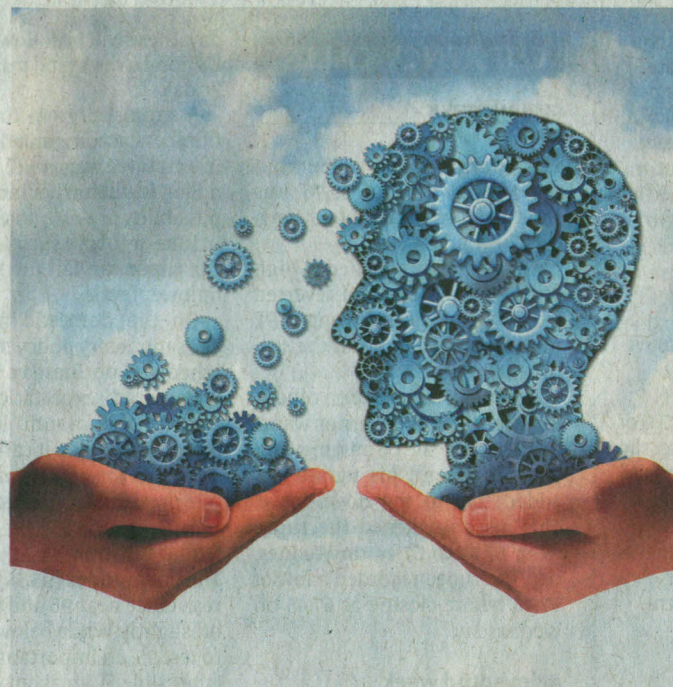
In short: should we want our youth to compete with the best in the world then capacity building needs to be taken to a higher and more effective plane.

Towards that goal the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, skill loan scheme and the national policy for skill development and entrepreneurship 2015 were launched. In all, 25 organisations including key ministries are currently involved in the daunting task of skilling youth for jobs. Their effort seems more visible in rural India dominated by youth with less educational qualifications and very few jobs going around. In urban slums, awareness about the programme is limited and the youth still seem to be looking around for skilling opportunities.

A skilling mission of this scale and magnitude is bound to have its share of teething troubles. Though there has been an effort to converge all the government projects under an umbrella, there is also need to standardise on quality, inputs and outcomes.

For that stringent standard operating procedures need to be put in place. Some organisations have them, but most do not. Till uniform standards are established, the mission may not gain the required acceleration although those associated with it are confident that the required correctives will be incorporated sooner than later.

According to experts, the mission faces many challenges. One of the major concerns has been the high drop-out rate among trained candidates — which is close to 70 per cent. It has been observed that though trained for three months, of which the last month is on-the-job orientation, and provided employment in in-



**Imparting excellence** That should be the target

dustrial townships or metros, candidates from the hinterland tend to return home, intimidated by urban culture and expectations.

### Keeping them

To reverse this trend, some steps have been taken. For instance, on April 1, the government issued Common Norms for all skilling programmes, which according to programme implementing agencies (PIAs) may help the situation to an extent, though it is too early to tell whether these are effective enough.

Under the Common Norms, PIAs are now offered an incentive up to ₹3,000 per candidate if he or she retains a job for over 12 months and ₹5,000 per candidate for progression to a salary of ₹15,000 per month. One-third of the incentive paid to the PIA goes to the candidate in addition to his or her salary.

To help candidates retain jobs, the PIAs seem to have formulated their own methods. They per-

suade companies to hire in batches from the same training centre to cut costs and increase support and safety of candidates. Skilled migrants are also helped with accommodation and encouraged to live together to enhance the sense of camaraderie.

I saw the PIA intervention at work when I interacted with three sales assistants in HyperCITY, a department store in Noida. The sisters Baghe — Anita and Banita — and their friend Rupali Samal all hail from Odisha's Koraput district. They were trained at a centre in Bhubaneswar and joined work seven months ago.

Though placed in different sections of the store, they keep common-working hours, live, cook and travel together to and from work. They share the rent of the room where they stay and pitch in with all the domestic chores.

Every few months they send home a few thousand rupees, spending only a fraction of the

over ₹7,000 they earn per month. They even manage to put aside a small sum in their bank accounts. "It is our first job and our first time here in the big city. But because we have each other, it is easier to cope," Rupali says. From a single parent family she had to persuade her mother to allow her to go to distant Delhi.

### Missing the buzz

Ramesh Menon, CEO, at HyperCITY Retail (India), recalls a time when recruiting agencies brought raw hands from rural areas and threw them into unfamiliar jobs in alien environments. "Unable to cope with the city and job, they would vanish in a few days. In contrast, the ones who come now with certificates and experience are more confident and able to adapt better," he says.

Very clearly, some hand-holding and support is required as the new recruits acclimatise themselves to an alien urban environment.

Recently, the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) introduced a migration support framework to address homesickness and cultural alienation. This may be a good strategy. It has envisaged migration support centres in every State that will serve as "a home away from home" for the recruits. State governments are also supported with a fund of ₹10 lakh per centre per annum.

Apart from the high dropout rate, the Skilling India initiative has another impediment. It has not been able to create a buzz about itself. Nor has it excited the industry enough for its candidates to be picked up on a priority basis.

There are still questions being asked about the quality of some of the training being imparted. To make its mark, the programme needs to not only scale up but adhere to international benchmarks and build a better skilling reputation.