



Karnataka minister for higher education and tourism RV Deshpande addresses the gathering

Srinu Raju, Sushma Berlia, Prabhu Chawla and Usha Ananthasubramanian gather after the session

# PREP TALK FROM BIZ BIGGIES

Panelists give their thumbs up for increased industry-institute tie-ups to improve employability of fresh graduates

JONATHAN ANANDA | CHENNAI

Only increased industry-institute interaction can solve the rapidly emerging issue of unemployment of fresh graduates. This was the broad agreement among panelists at a discussion on India Inc's contribution to education. Titled 'India Inc is not doing enough to further the cause of education', the panel featured Apeejay Stya and Svrn Group president Sushma Berlia, Karnataka Minister for Higher Education and Tourism RV Deshpande, TVS Motors CMD Venu



There is enough capital in this country to effect real changes in education  
**– Sushma Berlia,**  
*co-founder and prez,*  
*Apeejay Edu Society*

Srinivasan, MD of Peepul Capital Srinu Raju and CMD of Bharatiya Mahila Bank Usha Ananthasubramanian.

Deshpande began by pointing out that India's industries and academia have, for too long, worked in isolation from one another. "One of the biggest problems in India is that the higher education sector and the industry have worked in isolation for too long. This isolation has to end and these sectors have to come together for their own interests and the interest of the nation," he said. Human resources would be the greatest challenge facing economies in the 21st century. India, with its very young demographic, stood a great chance at capitalising on that if only we could train our manpower properly. "No other part of the world has our demographic," he stressed.

Srinivasan, however, laid the onus squarely on the government's shoulders. He opined that it was the primary duty of the government to provide health and education. "This is the model all over the world," he stated, pointing out that "at best industry can only supplement government's efforts." Going on to point out that China, which started its system of formal education much later than India, has long surpassed us in terms of both quantity and quality, he said that the quality of education in India was such that a third grade student in China was better informed and skilled than an 8th grade student. "The education



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*Peepul Capital*

industry in India is overregulated and under-governed," he said, adding that "the manpower we have is such that only 1 in 4 engineering graduates actually possesses the skills of an engineer."

Raju bolstered Srinivasan's argument by pointing out the state of Andhra Pradesh's graduate education. "AP has 750 engineering colleges and only 100 odd ITIs. This is an excessively top heavy system and most of our engineering graduates have none of the skills an engineer is expected to have," he stated. "We have to not only give them the skills

they require, but also find a way to employ them."

But can academia alone provide the skill sets that the industry is looking for? Deshpande contended that without industry inputs, academia is not equipped to facilitate the transfer of skills. "And our industry has to realise that unless and until we can skill our manpower, sustaining them is going to be difficult," Deshpande asserted. "Our problem is that students are not taught what the industry wants. And to do that, we need increased industry-institute interaction."

Ananthasubramanian also brought to focus the inadequacy of India's research and development policy as another major issue that needed resolution. "In the west, universities contribute to a large number of patents," she said. "We need the same kind of push in India. And this cannot be done without industry investment in universities." And while education and health were primarily the government's obligations, it was imperative that the corporate world is involved with the education system, she said. "A consortia of corporates investing in education will go a huge way towards better facilities and infrastructure. It is imperative that we involve them," she stressed.

Sushma Berlia summarised the larger issue and concluded by pointing out that while the industry was doing a lot towards education, there was a lot more it could do. She pointed out that "Of all CSR (corporate social responsibility) activities, 75 per cent of funds were donated

towards education, and there is a lot to be gained by corporates and academia, with increased cooperation between the two – either in terms of partnerships or in terms of philanthropy. The industry can't be asked to do this for their benefit but they can definitely contribute towards education philanthropically. "There is enough capital in this country to effect real changes in education," she stressed. "What we need to figure out is how to potentiate this capital towards that goal, she concluded"

— edex@newindianexpress.com



Like western universities, we need to push research  
**– Usha Ananthasubramanian,**  
*Bharatiya Mahila Bank*