

Learning to compete

Skill India needs a sharp realignment if it is to meaningfully transform people's life chances



SANTOSH MEHROTRA & ASHUTOSH PRATAP

In 2013, India's skill agenda got a push when the government introduced the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). This organises all qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude, just like classes in general academic education. For instance, level 1 corresponds to Class 9 (because vocational education is only supposed to begin in secondary school in many countries, including India). Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 correspond to Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12, respectively. Levels 5-7 correspond to undergraduate education, and so on. For each trade/occupation or professional qualification, course content should be prepared that corresponds to higher and higher level of professional knowledge and practical experience.

The framework was to be implemented by December 27, 2018. The Ministry mandated that all training/educational programmes/courses be NSQF-compliant, and all training and educational institutions define eligibility criteria for admission to various courses in terms of NSQF levels, by that time.

In this article, we look at NSQF implementation through the prism of national skill competitions, or India Skills, a commendable initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). Twenty-seven States participated in India Skills 2018, held in Delhi. Maharashtra led the medals tally, followed by Odisha and Delhi. Now, teams will be selected to represent India at the 45th World Skills Competition, scheduled in Russia this year. It was also heartening that the Abilympics was included in India Skills 2018, for Persons with Disabilities.

Course curriculum not clear

However, there are two priorities requiring action before the next round of India Skills is held. There are five pillars of the skills ecosystem: the secondary schools/polytechnics; in-



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dustrial training institutes; National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)-funded private training providers offering short-term training; 16 Ministries providing mostly short-term training; and employers offering enterprise-based training. From which training programmes and NSQF courses did participants come to the competition? The answers to this would hold the key to improve Skill India government programmes dramatically.

Meanwhile, the India Skills competition has provided evidence that many reforms are critical and urgent. We have advocated these reforms in the Sharda Prasad Expert Group report, submitted to the MSDE in 2016.

India Skills was open to government industrial training institutes, engineering colleges, Skill India schemes, corporates, government colleges, and school dropouts. Skill India is understood to mean courses that are compliant with the NSQF. A majority of the participants were from corporates (offering enterprise-based training) and industrial training institutes; only less than 20% were from the short-term courses of the NSDC. Neither industrial training institutes nor corporates' courses are aligned with the NSQF.

This points to the need for more holistic training and the need to re-examine the narrow, short-term NSQF-based NSDC courses to include skills in broader occupation groups, so that trainees are skilled enough to compete at the international level. If India Skills 2018 was only open for the NSQF-aligned institutions, it would have been a big failure. This

indicates that the NSQF has not been well accepted or adopted across India. One reason for this is that unlike for general academic education, which requires the completion of certain levels of certification before further progression is permitted, there is no clear definition of the course curriculum within the NSQF that enables upward mobility. There is no connection of the tertiary level vocational courses to prior real knowledge of theory or practical experience in a vocational field, making alignment with the NSQF meaningless. Efforts to introduce new Bachelor of Vocation and Bachelor of Skills courses were made, but the alignment of these UGC-approved Bachelor of Vocation courses was half-hearted. There is no real alignment between the Human Resource Development Ministry (responsible for the school level and Bachelor of Vocation courses) and the Ministry of Skill Development (responsible for non-school/non-university-related vocational courses).

Too many councils

We must also reduce complications caused by too many Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) anchoring skill courses. World Skills holds competitions in construction and building technology, transportation and logistics, manufacturing and engineering technology, information and communication technology, creative arts and fashion, and social and personal services. To cater to these sectors, 19 SSCs participated in India Skills 2018 as knowledge partners with the help of industry or academic institutions.

But India has 38 SSCs (earlier it had 40). Why did the others not participate? The first reason is that the representation of their core work was done by the other SSCs. For example, we have four SSCs for manufacturing: iron and steel, strategic manufacturing, capital goods, and, infrastructure equipment. In effect these are treated as one in World Skills courses. As we had proposed, there should be just one SSC called the Machinery and Equipment Manufacturing Council, in line with the National Industrial Classification of India. Similarly, there is no reason to have four SSCs (instead of one) each of textile, apparel made-ups and home furnishing, leather and handicrafts.

It was a mistake to create 40 SSCs. Outcomes have shown that they have been ineffective. If we want Skill India trainees to win international competitions and if we want competitors to come from schemes of the Ministry, we must find a way to provide broader skills in broader occupational groups.

The second, and related, reason is that the other SSC courses were not comprehensive enough for students to compete. Most of their NSDC-SSC-approved training does not produce students who can showcase "holistic" skills for broad occupational groups in such competitions. This takes us back to the point made in our report: sectors should be consolidated in line with the National Industrial Classification of India. This will improve quality, ensure better outcomes, strengthen the ecosystem, and help in directly assessing the trainee's competence. It might also bring some coherence to our skills data collection system.

India could learn a lesson from Germany, which imparts skills in just 340 occupation groups. Vocational education must be imparted in broadly defined occupational skills, so that if job descriptions change over a youth's career, she is able to adapt to changing technologies and changing job roles. Skill India needs a sharp realignment, if India is to perform well in the World Skills competition later this year.

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The coast is unclear

The Coastal Regulation Zone notification of 2018 increases the vulnerability of coastal people to climate disasters



MANJU MENON & KANCHI KOHLI

The National Democratic Alliance government has unleashed several extremely unimaginative developmental policies that target areas that have retained some degree of ecological value to turn them into sites for industrial production. This is despite evidence of the damaging effects of such policies. The latest instance of this is the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification of 2018. The government has announced "amendments" to the CRZ law which, in the words of the fisher leader from Goa, Olencio Simoes, spell the death of the coasts. These changes negate the coastal space entirely of its special socio-ecological uniqueness and open up this niche space that joins land and sea to mindless real estate development, mass scale tourism, and industry.

Devalued fisheries economy

Successive governments have created the impression that India's coastline is a vast, empty space that economic actors can take over. Industrialists and real estate developers share this view because coastal lands are for the most part outside the regime of individual property rights. Land grabbing by private and government actors has been the norm. These actors forget that this space is the common property of coastal villages, towns and cities, and public beaches. Over 3,000 fishing hamlets reside along India's coast, park and repair their nets and boats and organise their economic and social activities here. The fisheries sector employs 4-9 million people. The self-reliant fisher communities generate ₹48,000-₹75,000 crore for the economy, with almost no support from governments in the form of subsidies.

A government that has performed dismally on its promise of employment generation should avoid taking away the jobs of people engaged in this sector. Yet, that is exactly what this notification seeks to do. The misfortune of the fisher communities is their lack of effective political representation. Even though at least 75 MPs are elected from coastal constituencies, as stated by V. Vivekanandan of South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, fisher people are not a vote bank as they are spread across the coast. This may be why they are the targets of hostile government policies.

With rapid urbanisation and industrialisa-

tion, coasts have become convenient dumping grounds. Sewage, garbage and sludge from industrial processes land up on the coastline and makes life for coastal dwellers a living hell. The new amendments legalise the setting up of common effluent treatment plants (CETPs), an impractical technology for cleaning up waste, on the most fragile parts of the coast. These projects have made the coastal people of Saurashtra and south Gujarat more vulnerable to toxicity in their food, water and air. Since India's systems to reduce waste generation and comply with pollution standards are so poor, the law now makes the coasts legitimate receptacles for all waste.

India's coasts are already facing climate change events such as intensive, frequent and unpredictable cyclones and erosion. In 2017, cyclone Ockhi killed over 300 people on the west coast, a region not familiar with such events. The combined effects of harmful coastal development and climate change are apparent in the form of mass migrations from coastal areas like Odisha and the Sunderbans in West Bengal. These lessons have already sparked decentralised action: mangroves are being planted, sand dunes and coastal wetlands are being protected, and coastal communities and local governments are collaborating on disaster preparedness. But the top-down policy of the Central government to encroach what's left of the coasts and increase activities that involve dredging, sand removal, and large-scale constructions contradict grass-roots and scientific wisdom.

Risking lives

It is untrue that this notification has been introduced after consultations with "other stakeholders". The National Fishworkers Forum (NFF), for instance, has vociferously opposed these amendments since the review was announced in June 2014 by the Shailesh Nayak Committee. It has carried out protests demanding fisher rights to the coastal commons and legal action against corporate and government violators of coastal laws. The indifference of the government to coastal and marine regions has even led the forum to demand a separate Fisheries Ministry. Instead of using the NFF's knowledge to craft an effective policy, the government has peddled the same development model that has generated conflict and impoverishment. The notification now exposes more people to the unassessed impacts of climate change-related coastal damages. Is the capital too far from coastal India to understand this?

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SINGLE FILE

Hitting its stride

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has grown stronger, but it should develop a wider portfolio of projects

SOURABH GUPTA



On January 16, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) marked its third anniversary. India has been the bank's biggest beneficiary, with a quarter of the AIIB's approved projects geared towards its development. India is also the only country apart from China to enjoy a permanent seat on the Bank's board of directors.

When the AIIB opened for business in 2016, critics assailed it as a barely concealed attempt by China, India and the global south to supplant the existing international financial order. The reality is that the bank has been both a rule-maker and rule-taker, devising innovations in multilateral development finance while upholding existing best practices. Most of its projects are co-financed with the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, suggesting a healthy mix of complementarity and competition with its peers.

Critics also assailed the AIIB for its non-transparent internal procedures, notably the lack of a resident board, and potentially lax loan appraisal standards, which they claimed would spark a rash of irrecoverable loans. Former U.S. President Barack Obama's administration sought to dissuade Western countries and Asian allies from joining the bank as prospective founding members, pointing to concerns related to governance and environmental and social safeguards. The reality is that the AIIB's lending practices have been socially conscious and prudent, attested by its triple-A credit rating secured from the three major international rating agencies. Disregarding the U.S.'s "dog in the manger" attitude towards infrastructure finance, 90-odd countries have signed up as founding or prospective members.

As the AIIB marches from strength-to-strength, it should develop a wider portfolio of projects in areas such as smart cities, renewable energy, urban transport, clean coal technology, solid waste management and urban water supply. Along with the New Development Bank, its uniqueness must lie in faster loan appraisal, a lean organisational structure resulting in lower cost of loans, a variety of financing instruments, including local currency financing, and flexibility in responding to its clients' needs. It should leverage its unique 'special funds mechanism' to crowd-in infrastructure financing from external sources, including extra-regional, public and private, as well as nurture infrastructure as a profitable asset class for capital market investors.

A distracted U.S. appears neither willing nor capable of fundamentally reshaping and resourcing the much-vaunted Bretton Woods-era institutions for the challenges of the 21st century. India, China and other multilaterally minded major countries will need to pick up this gauntlet in the areas of trade, development and finance. The successful mainstreaming of the AIIB in three short years must become just the beginning of system-wide reform and overhaul.

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FAQ

TV choices, à la carte

How the new TRAI regulatory framework will pan out

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA

What does TRAI's new regulation say?

The new regulatory framework by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which comes into effect from February 1, will apply to all direct-to-home (DTH) and local cable operators. Under these rules, customers can choose which channels they wish to watch rather than pick from pre-decided packs offered by service providers. Accordingly, consumers will only need to pay for channels they want to view.

Why was this change needed?

According to TRAI, post-digitisation of cable TV networks in March 2017, there was an urgent need to improve transparency as many stakeholders were not giving choices to consumers. The new regulatory framework has been introduced after a consultative

process that lasted more than one-and-a-half years.

Do the new rules benefit consumers?

The new framework makes it mandatory for the service provider to offer every channel on an à la carte basis. Additionally, the MRP of the channels needs to be displayed on the TV screen through the Electronic Program Guide. Along with giving customers à la carte choice, broadcasters and distributors can offer bouquets of channels. However, the price of the bouquet is also to be published transparently. Given that the MRP of the channels will be displayed to users, the distributor will not be able to charge more than what has been declared by a broadcaster. This is likely to bring down the monthly cable/DTH bill.

How much will consumers need to pay?

The framework puts in

place a network capacity fee with an upper ceiling of ₹130 for 100 channels. Any subscriber who opts for more than 100 channels can choose additional channels in each slab of 25 channels with a maximum price of ₹20 per slab. A high definition channel will be treated as two standard definition (SD) channels for the purpose of determining the network capacity fee.

According to TRAI, less than 15% of consumers are likely to opt for more than 100 channels. The regulator has put out some examples of the probable packs in different markets on its website. For the Tamil-speaking market, one package costs ₹294 a month, including taxes for 100 SD channels. This pack includes 23 paid channels, 52 free-to-air channels and 25 Doordarshan channels. In addition to a ₹130 network capacity fee for 100 channels, the consumer will have to pay MRP for the 23

paid channels (amounting to ₹119) and the GST (₹45). Depending on the number and price of the paid channels, the bill may go up.

What if subscription charges are paid ahead?

In case a subscriber has paid advance charges for a scheme with a future lock-in period like an annual plan, the distributor will continue to provide services for the committed period without any increase in price or charges and without altering the other terms of subscription. Distributors cannot make any changes that may lead to a disadvantage to the subscriber in such cases, the regulator has said. However, if the subscriber wants to switch over to a new package after February 1, the proportional balance amount of the existing package as on the date of switchover may be adjusted for the new package prices.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 17, 1969

Ban on bigamous marriages

Bigamous marriages by employees of the Central Government men or women, have been prohibited under the latest Service Conduct Rules, except on special grounds. These are: Where such marriage would be permissible under the personal law applicable to the employee concerned or where there were "other grounds" for doing so. Even under the original conduct rules, it was the Government's intention that the ban on bigamous marriages should apply both to men and women employees. But this was not brought out by the actual wording of the rules. The revised All-India Service Conduct Rules gazetted on December 18 last year make this clear beyond doubt. The relevant rule reads: "No member of the service shall enter into or contract, a marriage with any person having a spouse living." The Government, however, may permit such marriage where it was allowed in the personal law or on other valid grounds.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 17, 1919

Bombay Labour Unrest.

To-day [January 15, in Bombay] after the firing and as the crowd cleared, the Officer Commanding the troops appreciating the situation ceased firing with approval. Besides Mr. Aston, Rao Bahadur Chunilal H. Setalvad, Mr. Frank Olivira, Messrs Ghulam Husain, Rahimullah, Khairaj and Athavle were also present in the mill district from early morning and had to hasten to the different localities where disturbances were reported. At Hornby Vellard 200 persons were stopped by the Light Horse Patrol. Here Mr. Athavle and a number of policemen were despatched with instructions to disperse the crowd and arrest those who might disobey. Mr. Khairaj was despatched with a number of policemen to the Mackenzie Saw Mills near Sewri Cemetery where a number of rioters were interfering with workmen in the mill.

CONCEPTUAL Repugnant market

ECONOMICS

This refers to certain markets where transactions between willing buyers and sellers are considered to be unethical. The market for human organs, for instance, is considered by many to be a repugnant market. A section of people believe that organ transplants should be facilitated through voluntary donations rather than through the exchange of money. Many governments have banned the functioning of these markets due to various moral concerns that have been raised. Supporters of repugnant markets, however, believe that allowing the exchange of money helps people in serious need to gain easier access to supplies than they would otherwise.

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