

Primary, Secondary Education is State's Responsibility: Rakesh Mohan



*L-R: **Rakesh Mittal**, Vice Chairman, Bharti Enterprises; **R S Pawar**, Chairman and Co-Founder of the NIIT Group; **Viswanathan Anand**, World Chess Champion; **Rakesh Mohan**, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India; Moderator: **Anu Aga**, Director, Thermax Ltd.*

The primary responsibility to ensure education for all at an affordable price lies with the State and today the need is to strengthen public education. **Mr Rakesh Mohan, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India**, said this at the session on 'Educating India: Priorities and Prospects for a Brighter Future' during a seminar on 'Ideas India 2008', being organized by Aspen Institute India here.

Mr Mohan said that State education is very important at the primary and secondary school level as it is a social responsibility. "The world over primary and secondary education is provided by the State," he pointed out. "This makes it much more important to improve the quality of public education," he said.

He pointed out that over the last 20 years, the number of children being admitted at the primary school level has gone up. "This is a positive change that can be seen; more and more parents in rural areas want their children to be educated and we need to respond to this increased demand and awareness," Mr Mohan said. "This makes it much more important to improve the quality of education and to ensure development of skills so that when these children graduate, they are ready to be absorbed into the job market," he added.

While agreeing with Mr Mohan that primary and secondary education is mainly the responsibility of the State, **Mr Rakesh Mittal, Vice-Chairman, Bharti Enterprises**, advocated that the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model could go a long way in improving education standards in the country. "There is a problem with the delivery system of government education," he said adding that the quality of education is poor and moreover, there is no accountability. "In such a scenario, the private sector can be quite helpful; some primary schools where teachers and facilities are a problem can be handed over to the private players," Mr Mittal said. He pointed out that drop-out rate is one of the biggest problems and suggested "child labour should attract the highest punishment as it would help in checking children dropping out of school to earn."

Mr R S Pawar, Chairman and Co-Founder of the NIIT Group, suggested three reforms that can be taken up to improve the education system. According to him, "there should be academic reform which means what to teach and how to teach; administrative reform in terms of identifying and engaging people in the education system and going for PPP model; and, fiscal reform in terms of deciding what a school should charge as fees." In this context, Mr Pawar suggested delegation of decision-making power to the lowest level possible. "To have more accountability," he said, "the money earmarked for running a school in rural area should be put in the hands of the village."

A different perspective was provided by **Mr Viswanathan Anand, World Chess Champion**. He spoke of his experience of starting chess at a young age to make the point that "mental development of a child should start as early as possible." It is useful to be introduced to various things at a young age as the passions developed during childhood stay with a person for life, he added. "Somehow fun and games should be made a part of the curriculum as skills developed as a result of curiosity remain helpful all through the life," Mr Anand said. This, he pointed out, may help the school to retain students and it might have an affect on drop-out rates.

Anu Aga, Director, Thermax Ltd, moderated the discussion and said that it is time for a wake-up call to focus more intensely on the education system as it is in a very poor shape. Citing statistics, she wondered how the government allocations on education could be more effectively spent at the ground level.

New Delhi
December 19, 2008