



RACHIT GOSWAMI/www.indiatodayimages.com

"This year we will  
fall short  
of the target"



After a lifetime spent powering TCS to its current position as the country's pre-eminent technology company, **S. Ramadorai** took over as Advisor to the Prime Minister in the National Council for Skill Development in February 2011. He spoke to **Chaitanya Kalbag** and **Shamni Pande** on the gigantic skilling challenge the country faces. Edited excerpts:

**It is two years since you took charge. How are you tackling the skilling challenge?**

The scale of the problem is huge. A combination of things has made it more complex. The notion that everybody should have a paper degree, whether it gets them a job or not, has sunk in so deeply that changing mindsets, making people realise that doing something with their hands is as important and can fetch a livelihood, (is difficult). This is what I call

the whole advocacy issue. We are focusing a lot on advocacy.

After advocacy, you look at mobilisation. Mobilisation should be through discovering people's aptitudes rather than simply rounding up a bunch of kids and saying that from tomorrow you are doing vocational training whether you like it or not.

**Are you saying there is an aspiration gap? People need something, but want some-**

**thing else?**

Yes. It can only be changed with advocacy.

**Who is carrying out the advocacy?**

All of us. All of you have to do so too.

**I think there is a feeling among young people that a proper job provides security such as provident fund, health insurance, etc, which**

**jobs like welding do not.**

Long-term benefits such as PF have to come into the vocational area as well. But to bring about a miracle where everything happens overnight (is not possible). We are trying to operate at the mindset level, we are trying to operate at a level where we introduce vocational skills in schools...all of these will take time.

**There seems to be a turf war over skilling. Could the effort get bogged down because of the different things different stakeholders and ministries want?**

I think there are enough opportunities without getting into turf wars. And that is why I don't spend my time in Delhi. You have to be where the action is. Implementation is the only focus all of us must have. There are enough policies, enough opportunities, but implementation on ground is most difficult because it's like washing your own clothes. People hesitate to get into it, because it calls for rolling up your sleeves.

**What targets do you have?**

The numbers are huge. Whether it is 300 or 500 million doesn't matter. The number during the 12th Plan and the 13th Plan – a 10-year period from 2012 to 2022 – is going to be critical. The number is based on the demographic profile of the country.

**But numbers show this skilling year's targets are not being met.**

Yes. This year we will fall short of the target. But my worry would be more to ensure that people who go for vocational education and come out with training, get a job. It cannot be training for the sake of training. It has to be training with employment.

**What has been done to formalise vocational education?**

Pilot projects are running in Haryana, Assam. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (in Mumbai)

is doing English language training in association with British Council...

**Any successes you can share?**

You can go to the TCS office in Kolkata, where you can see the Udaan programme for Jammu & Kashmir. Youth from Kashmir have been trained and placed in BPO operations in the Kolkata office of TCS.

**How would you assess NSDC's performance?**

NSDC has multiple responsibilities. One is to identify private sector partners. Then it takes a position by way of debt funding, or equity and debt funding. We assess how the partners are doing. It is not like funding is committed for the entire duration. It is based on performance. It has done a good job of selecting partners.

**But there are reports that NSDC will not be given further funding. Does this not jeopardise ongoing projects?**

It is well funded enough for committing to the private partners it has identified. With the current credit situation squeeze in the country, there have been some cuts. It is a slight shift in the allocation probably, but it is not coming in the way of their performance.

**The prime minister has announced the setting up of a National Skill Development Authority. Will it not add to the complexity, with so many bodies already involved in skilling?**

No. Once the NSDA is formed, the co-ordination of 17 ministries will come under this single authority. The NSDC will continue to work with the private sector. So these will be the only two agencies and the NSDA will also oversee the NSDC's functioning.

**What will your role be in the NSDA?**

I have no idea, let the Authority get formed. I am focusing on my work. ♦