

Linking to grow

A more meaningful interaction between education and industry can only result from a collaborative approach to meeting infrastructural and human resource deficiencies, says **Srikanth Jadcherla**

WHILE most developed countries are still reeling under recession, the Indian economy is relatively stable and we are set for the next phase of growth. While the economy is growing, the purchasing power of Indians has risen to unprecedented heights. Indians in the past three decades have been heavy consumers of electronic goods and the number is only expected to rise further in the new decade.

According to a recent study done by Frost & Sullivan the Indian market for electronic products in 2005 stood at over \$32 billion and is expected to rise to \$320 billion by 2015. A recent book on Indian economy states that at this current growth rate, in the next five to seven years, India is expected to have 500 million new mobile phone users along with 400 million laptops, 650 million television sets and over 150 million refrigerators stocked in the market along with various other electronic goods. The telecom sector is also growing at a rapid pace of 30 per cent every year and is expected to maintain this rate throughout the next decade.

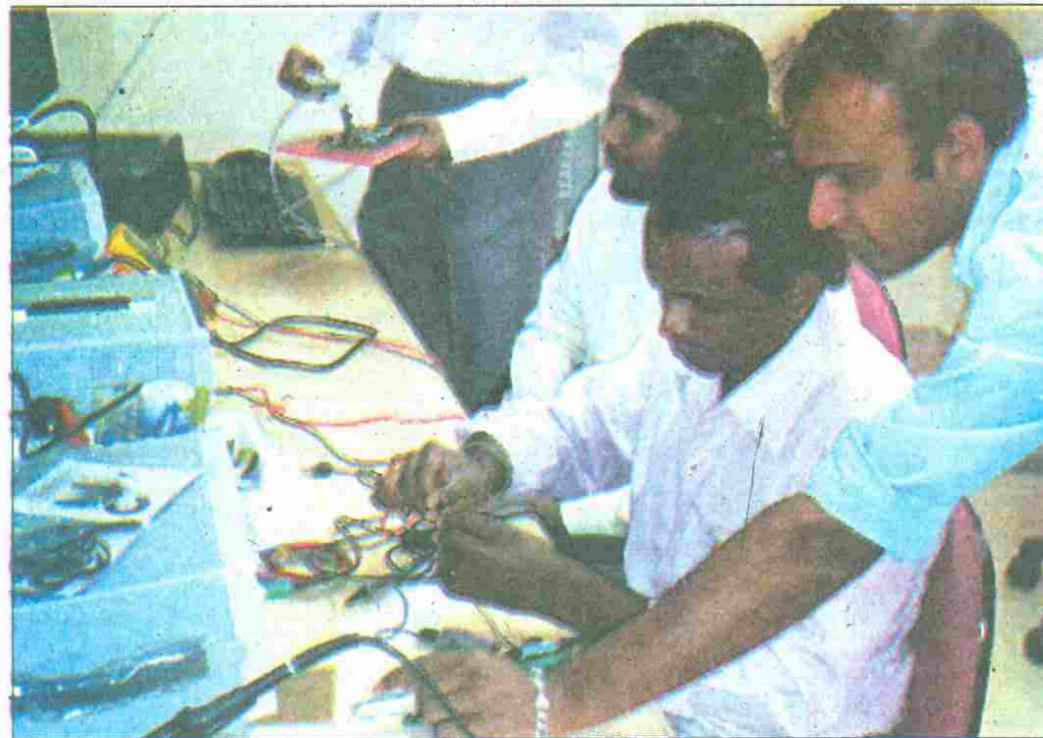
But is our ecosystem ready to meet the high demand of Indian consumers? May be not. Every year close to 1,00,000 electronics engineering graduates pass out and if each of these

stick to high profile jobs in India then, according to some optimistic figures, India will produce electronic goods worth \$200 billion by 2015. This still leaves a gap of \$

120 billion as regards expected demand — a figure close to our oil import bill!

The challenge before India today is to convert this burgeoning market into an economic opportunity by expanding/creating manufacturing facilities. This demand is also an opportunity to provide employment to both white collar and blue collar workers across India. The key to this would be to create a support system, which would invest in value-added electronics manufacturing. Our educational institutions and their curriculum require bringing in certain radical changes to meet this growing demand.

Often we hear comments from leading industrialists that majority of engineering graduates do not measure up to industry expectations. Similarly, we even hear



Electronics engineers should to stick to the Indian market, as opportunities are many and prospects bright.

students venting their frustration that though they have done what they were asked to companies find them redundant. This obviously reflects the gap between the academia and industry.

Global economic growth has ushered in a lot of technological changes. These changes, however, have not been leveraged to enable our graduates to compete in the industrial sector. While there can be no easy solutions to mend such a sorry state of affairs, attempts can of course be made to identify a few ideas that can be acted upon by the academia and industry on a long-term basis.

First, there is the need to be aware of all opportunities that lie ahead and teachers themselves need to be well-trained to expose students to special areas of interest. There is also a need to integrate industry requirements into our education system to understand the future areas of growth.

Currently, the efforts of industry leaders to interact with the academia also seem to be half-hearted. It is necessary to build the right workforce in order to take Indian industries forward. Many industrial giants, including Google and Yahoo are the outcome of university research. Unfortunately India, in spite of having some world class institutions, doesn't produce as impressive an output as other relatively underdeveloped nations. India should adopt the same model the Western world had adopted for a long time and with remarkable results. The industry needs to fund more research and development activities in universities and in return the academia needs to follow an industry-oriented curriculum to facilitate proper teacher training.

The involvement of industry in the curriculum can be accomplished by industry supervised projects for students that will help solve real life problems. This will go a long way in enhancing the technological capabilities of the country. Thus defining a capability and then enabling the academia with proper resources to achieve it should be the primary focus. In a nutshell, a collaborative effort is necessary for bridging the gap.

The writer is CEO, Seer Akademi