

THE HINDU Business Line

'Quality, an accepted norm today'

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At the 19th National Quality Summit to be organised by the CII Institute of Quality between December 1 and 3, over 45 speakers will provide different perspectives on the issue of 'quality' based on the industry they represent.

This year's theme is 'Creating Brand through Quality,' and will be viewed from the angle of the country having a powerful democracy, a buoyant economy and deep intellectual talent.

In this interview to Business Line, the Chairman of the CII Institute of Quality, Mr N. Kumar, who's also the Vice-Chairman of The Sanmar Group, stressed that quality is an accepted norm in Indian industry now.

Can you talk about the quality levels in Indian industry? Have we reached global levels across sectors?

Over the years, as we have become globally competitive, Indian industry and CII has been focussing on quality and it has become a non-compromising factor. I think, both in manufacturing and services, we have reached international quality levels.

What about services in the public/Government sector?

PSUs in India have come a long way. I think in Government services and in public, although we are headed in the right direction, we are moving at a slower pace. Even Government service providers have understood that customer is king now.

Has the industry brought in enough checks to ensure the highest quality levels?

Quality is an accepted norm in industry today. If you take the Deming Awards, outside of Japan, the largest number of winners is from India. So I think, on the issue of quality, we have straightaway gone to world-class standards.

In the pursuit of quality, will industry miss out on innovation?

No, these are two different issues. While quality is a given, innovation comes in many ways. The difference between China and India is that they have scaled innovation and we have not scaled it yet. We are still in the middle level.

Is sustainability a part of the quality initiatives?

Every company in the country is now talking about the triple bottomline comprising quality, CSR and sustainability. This is not just because there is public pressure, but the real need to undertake huge initiatives on greening.

Of course, quality is an over encompassing factor. If you have quality and you are wasting resources, then you won't be a quality company. But on the question of whether quality parameters ensure maximum sustainability, then I will say, no, it will come separately. Also, quality companies will be better recognised on the stock exchange.

Is the talent pool in the country adequate to manage the quality initiatives of corporates?

Quality is like internal audit, which was earlier, treated like policing. But now we have it in our system. So, people who produce are automatically also quality doers. We now see that it's becoming part of the DNA of the people. As a country we have to put a lot into the quality of education. We have to start with kindergarten education. We should also cover rural areas.

Can you talk about CII's initiatives in the area of quality?

When we started in 1995, quality was in the rudimentary stages. Then, in 2001, we set up the CII Institute of Quality. We have come a long way in 10 years. The Institute is an outcome of the industry initiatives that CII has heralded. We now have 10,000 members clamouring for quality. The key issue now for Indian corporates is competitiveness. Unless you have quality, you cannot be competitive.