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Policy advocacy, workshops, capacity & brand building are the 4 pillars of SCOPE: DG

"India's Public Sector is aware of the importance of digital technologies. We are also aware of the fact that we need to identify the gaps in technology deployment. We are studying the trends in emerging technologies like AI, ML, cloud computing, cyber security and data analytics."

The Public Sector Enterprises have been creating immense value, not only by making the country self-sufficient in critical areas of economy and fostering inclusive growth, but also by creating market value. About 75% of the PSEs are profitable and they demonstrate a significant commitment to value creation, strategic investment and consistent financial planning.

The report from Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), shows that since the introduction of the New PSE policy in January 2021, the NSE CPSE and BSE CPSE Indices have surpassed benchmarks, showcasing returns of 160.49% and 128.66%, respectively, until November 2023.

The Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) has been dedicated to the development of policies and strategies for promoting excellence among India's PSUs since the 1970s. Atul Sobti, Director General, SCOPE, in conversation with Anoop Verma, Editor (Desk), ETGovernment, sheds light on the work that SCOPE is doing for the benefit of the Public Sector.

Edited excerpts:

SCOPE is celebrating the Public Sector Day on April 10. What is the significance of this day?

SCOPE was established on April 10, 1973, with the aim of developing capacity and capability of the Public Sector and undertake policy advocacy. On this day, we highlight the contribution that the Public Sector has made to the national economy since independence. In 1951, there were five PSEs in the country.

Today the number of operating PSEs is 254. The PSEs have been playing a critical role in making the country self-sufficient in key sectors including defence, energy, transportation, strategic infrastructure and other areas. During the April 10 celebrations, SCOPE highlights the work that the PSEs are doing for taking the country close to the vision of Atmanirbharta. This year, SCOPE is holding month-long celebrations.

What are the key areas in which SCOPE works for safeguarding the interests of the Public Sector?

The four pillars on which SCOPE works for the betterment of the Public Sector are: policy advocacy and representation, programmes and workshops, capacity building and skill development, and brand building. In all these areas SCOPE has performed very well. Our aim is to make the Public Sector competitive not only in India but globally as well. We have been involved in diverse areas of policy, including MoU, DPE Guidelines, CSR and other policy related issues. In the area of capacity building, we have contributed significantly in corporate governance, leadership, HR, finance and other areas. Lately, we have been conducting programmes on women's empowerment, digitalization, climate awareness and lifelong learning.

How are you ensuring that the interests of India's Public Sector are safeguarded in various national and international forums?

SCOPE is participating in several forums to safeguard the interests of India's Public Sector. We are on the board of EPFO, ESI, and other organizations. We are also on the board of Dattopant Thengadi National Board for Workers Education and Development. We are on the board of the National Productivity Council and National Safety Council. Considering that the economy is getting globalized and many of our Public Sector Enterprises have global interests, we are representing them in important global bodies. SCOPE is part of the The United Nations Global Compact. We also represent the Public Sector in international forums like ILO, OECD and others.

In the area of policy advocacy, what are the key successes of SCOPE?

In policy advocacy SCOPE has been playing a major role. To cite one example, every year, before the announcement of the union budget, SCOPE submits its own memorandum on behalf of the Public Sector to the finance minister. We work closely with the Department of Public Enterprises in the formulation and reform of the guidelines and systems to bring more efficiency in the public sector. In international forums also we do policy advocacy on behalf of the Public Sector. As I pointed out earlier, we are part of forums like EPFO and ESI. Currently, the government has come up with a higher pension scheme. We are attempting to create greater awareness about this policy in PSEs.

You regularly organize programmes and workshops for the benefit of the PSE sector. What are the key advantages of these programmes and workshops?

The programmes that SCOPE organizes are well conceived, well researched, well planned and well executed. The key purpose of these programmes is capacity and capability building. We conduct the programmes to expose the public sector fraternity to new methods of working that will lead to efficiency and enhanced productivity. We strive to expose the public sector to the new developments that are taking place in areas of technology and other innovations. Our mandate is to help the Public Sector become future ready. We do workshops for personal development as well. For instance, we do programmes on the health of the employees, their financial wellness and psychological well being.

Are you also doing programmes in the digital medium?

We started doing programmes in the digital medium in the period when Covid struck the world and we collaborated with eminent faculty, including distinguished personnel from the government, industry, consultants, policy makers, for our webinars. During the period of covid alone, we conducted 29 webinars on several topics including spirituality, health, arbitration, finance, legal wills and nomination, HR and climate change. The recordings of the webinars can be accessed on our website. Even today, we continue to conduct major programmes in hybrid mode in order to broaden our reach and maximise the benefits of our efforts.

What are the new programmes that you have organized for the benefit of the Public Sector?

While SCOPE has been undertaking programs on diverse and emerging areas for capacity building of PSEs, let me give you an insight into the most recent programs that SCOPE organised in the month of March, when we did several programmes.

One of our programmes was on public procurement, which is a subject of importance for the public sector. This programme also included procurement through the Government e-Marketplace (GeM). To make all stakeholders in the Public Sector understand what the government's directive is regarding procurement, we conducted a programme in Shillong. Senior GeM officials were there at the programme. The Chairperson of the Competition Commission of India was an eminent guest at the programme and Secretary, Competition Commission also there. About 80 people from 35 organisations attended the programme.

Another important programme that we conducted in March was on RTI, a subject that is still not fully understood by many people. In this programme, the Chief Information Commissioner, Mr. Heera Lal Samariya, addressed the participants and guided them on the nuances of RTI. The programme was also addressed by State Information Commissioners, Senior Officers of CIC and experts in the field.

Third program that we conducted in March was on Decarbonization of PSEs of India and the role of green hydrogen. This is a pertinent area, especially for the Public Sector as they are present in hard-to-abate areas, and hence, new alternative resources need to be introduced in their processes so as to enable them to reduce carbon footprint. In fact, we received very encouraging feedback with people expressing their satisfaction over the information received and looked forward to more such programs by SCOPE.

While, our attempt is to undertake programs on most pertinent subjects, it is also our endeavor to organize these in diverse places across the country so as to ensure inclusive development in line with the national agenda.

Digital technologies are evolving at a fast pace. The governments, big enterprises and consumers are now grappling with emerging technologies like AI, ML, data analytics, etc. Are you conducting programmes for digital transformation in the Public Sector?

Technology has made deep inroads in all aspects of our life and profession. In the future, the companies which deploy the best technologies will survive and thrive. India's Public Sector is aware of the importance of digital technologies. We are also aware of the fact that we need to identify the gaps in technology deployment. We also need to explore the possibilities of finding technology transfer, the opportunities for which are currently less in the country. SCOPE is doing extensive research and studies in this area. We have joined hands with the Institute of Management Technology (IMT) to conduct research on the digitalisation of the Public Sector. We have created a board-level committee to study the issue of digital transformation. We are studying the trends in emerging technologies like AI, ML, cloud computing, cyber security and data analytics.

How detailed is the research that you are conducting in the area of digital technologies and transformation?

We understand that the future for any company lies in expanding and exploring its digital efficiencies. SCOPE is addressing the digitalisation aspect in various domains. But currently our programmes in digital technologies are aimed at creating awareness and broad understanding. We are yet to explore and deep dive into ways and methods by which emerging digital technologies like AI can be optimally utilized for individual PSEs. In the times to come, we are attempting to develop our capacities in this regard. Even during the Covid period, we focussed on digitalization and organized a webinar in collaboration with a major think tank, on the Future Readiness of the PSUs.

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