NEW DELHI, November 12, 2011. Mr. Sam Pitroda, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovations, made a strong pitch today for displaying a concern for public good, calling for tabling and passing the 12-odd Bills in Parliament for reform of higher education.

Addressing the FICCI Higher Education Summit 2011, Mr. Pitroda said, “Higher education reforms are essential if the nation is to meet the serious challenge of skill shortage that will not allow the economy to grow at 8-10 per cent annually. While many of the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission are in the process of being implemented, we are waiting for the government to act on the recommendations retailing to reform of higher education.”

“The debate on what needs to be done ought to be over, the time now is to focus on action,” he said and added that “the Bills have already been drafted but none of them have been tabled in or passed by Parliament.”

Mr. Pitroda’s concern found an echo in FICCI President, Mr. Harsh Mariwala’s suggestion that although education continues to be a priority sector during the Twelfth Plan, unless the reform agenda initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the 11th Plan is carried forward within a stringent timeframe, the demographic dividend of a young population could become a demographic disaster for India as well as the world.

Mr. Mariwala hoped that the Foreign Education Providers’ Bill; Unfair Practices Bill; Tribunal Bill and the Accreditation Bill will be passed in the coming winter session of the Parliament and the National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) Bill 2010 and Innovation University Bill will be introduced in the winter session of the Parliament. The delay in implementation of the reforms is a serious impediment for the economic development of the country, he said and added that FICCI earnestly urges the political leadership to take cognizance of this fact.

Mr. Pitroda said that the government was creating a US$ 5 billion National Knowledge Network (NKN) which is expected to be ready in about nine months. The network would be a state-of-the-art multi-gigabit pan-India network for providing a unified high speed network backbone for all knowledge related institutions in the country. It would facilitate the building of quality institutions with requisite research facilities and creating a pool of highly trained professionals. The NKN will enable scientists, researchers and students from different backgrounds and diverse geographies to work closely for advancing human development in critical and emerging areas.

The NKN would be a platform for delivering effective distance education where teachers and students can interact in real time. This is especially significant in a country like India where access to education is limited by factors such as geography, lack of infrastructure facilities etc. The network enables co-sharing of information such as classroom lectures, presentations and handouts among different institutions.
Earlier, Mr. Mariwala pointed out that lack of Industry-academia linkages was one of the critical reasons for rise in unemployable graduates in the country. “Although we have clusters of industries, there is minimalistic interaction with the local academia. To facilitate sustained mechanism for industry-academia interactions, FICCI under the leadership of Prof M Anandakrishnan has developed the concept of National Knowledge Functional Hubs (NKFH) which is a hub and spoke model to create an ecosystem for entrepreneurial, vocational and skill development across the entire value chain,” he announced.

In next 12 months, FICCI proposes to set up 5 National Knowledge Functional Hubs in partnership with Industry Champions from capital goods sector and Patron Institutions all over India. Mr. K Venkataramanan, Chairman, FICCI Capital Goods Committee and President, Operation, L&T is spearheading the industry side. Institute patrons have been identified as NMIMS, Thapar, Manipal, Amrita and UPES Universities and industry patrons are L&T, BPCL, ISGEC, Thermax, Bharat Forge, Chemtrols, Hindustan Dor Oliver, J W Precision Tools.