

Commonwealth

Changing Role Of State In Education

Asif Khan

MORE scholarships for Commonwealth students and partnerships between the state and the private sector in promoting education and research will be among topics discussed when Commonwealth education ministers meet in Pakistan next month.

The ministers will look at ways to share the burden of education, including funding, among different levels of government and with the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

The changing role of the state in education: politics and partnerships will be the main theme of the four-day conference starting on November 27. It will be held in Islamabad and opened by Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

The meeting will provide the ministers with an opportunity to reexamine arrangements for the control of education, including experiences of decentralisation of education management.

They will consider the challenges to national control over education decision-making posed by regional organisations or by dependence on external aid.

The conference has been arranged by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the London-based international organisation at the service of all Commonwealth members, in conjunction with the Government of Pakistan.

Pakistan's minister of education Khurshed Ahmed Shah will chair the meeting. It is expected to be attended by more than 40 Commonwealth countries, including South

Africa which recently rejoined the Commonwealth after 33 years.

A review of the Secretariat's work programme in education will be among items on the agenda; Commonwealth cooperation in education and human resource development will be another.

The conference will look at developments at the Commonwealth of Learning, based in Vancouver, Canada, which promotes human resource development in member countries using distance education techniques.

To assist them in their deliberations, the ministers will have before them country papers and a paper by the Secretariat on Commonwealth countries' experiences in various aspects of the theme.

The paper is based on information from around the Commonwealth on significant developments in the last five years and their impact on the role of the state in education.

The ministers will debate international cooperation in higher education, including support for developing countries in such areas as management, staff development and books and journals.

They will examine the report of the Commonwealth working group on human resource development strategies, Foundation for the Future, which has special relevance to the conference theme. The group was led by Dr Sam Pitroda of India, who will be at Islamabad.

Several 'roundtables' will enable the ministers to meet in smaller groups to consider subjects ranging from school inspection and teacher

education to regional cooperation in education.

They will review the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, one of the largest and most successful schemes of its kind in the world.

The plan, now in its 35th year, offers men and women of high intellectual promise the opportunity to study in a Commonwealth country other than their own.

Some 1700 awards are made annually under the plan which is a series of bilateral arrangements under which scholarships are offered for study in the awarding country.

The ministers will consider ways to increase the awards to 2,000 and to encourage more students from advanced members to study in the developing Commonwealth, which has traditionally provided most of the scholars.

The concern caused by educational programmes beamed by satellite television companies from abroad which may conflict with educational priorities of recipient countries may be another talking point at Islamabad.

The ministers may exchange experiences of framing national policy in the light of international developments such as the trend towards external degree courses delivered at a distance.

They will hear the latest from the Delors Commission which is looking at education worldwide in the 21st century.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku is among

eminent persons serving as 'distinguished advisers' to the commission headed by Jacques Delors, president of the Commission of the European Communities.

The advisers include Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway; and Sir Yehudi Menuhin, the British violinist who in 1970 won the Nehru award for peace and international understanding.

Chief Anyaoku will lead a Secretariat team to Islamabad. It will include Deputy Secretary-General Sir Humphrey Maud of Britain and Mr Jakes Swartland from Botswana, acting head of the Secretariat's Education Department.

Also in the team will be Dr Jasbir Sarjit Singh of Malaysia, Dr Lucy Steward of Trinidad and Tobago and Dr Henry Kaluba from Zambia, chief programme officers in the department, besides Mrs Gail Larose, a Canadian consultant, previously head of the higher education unit in the department.

Michael Fathers from New Zealand, a former Reuters correspondent, now director of the Secretariat's Information and Public Affairs Division, will be the conference spokesman.

Mr Swartland who recently visited Islamabad to discuss arrangements for the meeting, said: "Preparations are going well, and we are all greatly looking forward to it."

This will be the 12th conference of Commonwealth education ministers since the series began at Oxford University in Britain in 1959.

— Commonwealth Feature