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# Zee Learn to spend 700 cr, set up 300 schools across India

Group aims to educate one million children by 2015

**D Ram Raj, CHENNAI**

Zee Learn, the education division of ETC Networks Ltd, will be hived off into a separate entity and will invest around Rs500 crore to Rs700 crore by 2015 to set up 300 schools as well as an ongoing university project in Uttarakhand.



**Sumeet Mehta**

"Zee Learn will become an independent company in about 30 days, while ETC Networks will merge with Zee Entertainment. Zee Learn will become an automatically listed

company," Essel Group chairman Subhash Chandra, who was in Chennai to celebrate Zee Learn's fastest 50, told reporters on Thursday.

Zee School is now the second largest chain of schools in the private-unaided category. It has 55 schools in 48 cities.

"My political friends at times feel that the huge human capital of India of 1.1 billion people will be a liability as they are worried about how to feed so many mouths. If we evolve a proper education system and create enabled minds, they will not go against the grain of society. The intention in our schools is to ensure at least 90% of students excel instead of focusing on the cream of 10% toppers. A frustrated child can take recourse to malpractices and that is where we will be sowing the seeds of evil in society," he said.

"We are investing about Rs100

► **SUBHASH CHANDRA, Essel Group chairman**

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crore in a university in Uttaranchal called Himgiri Nabh Vidyalaya. It is a common practice for people to say they are helpless in society. As a group, we do not want to be helpless and our target is to reach one million children by 2015. This is a part of our corporate social responsibility and we are conscious that revenues will not be as big as any other business model," Chandra said while recalling the number of "Nos" that he

heard when he ventured into launching a satellite TV channel.

Zee Learn reached the target of 50 schools last December. That was within a year of its first school launch on December 17, 2008.

"The schools will be set up across India, depending on where the demand arises. They will be both in partnerships as well as company-owned," Zee Learn CEO Sumeet Mehta said.

"In terms of area, we insist on a minimum of 1.5 acres in congested cities. A major criterion to choose our partners will be an overwhelming passion for education. The schools are affiliated to CBSE. We will soon start an international school. We will also have schools affiliated to state boards. Of the 300 schools planned by 2015 to reach out to 1 million students, 200 will be in partnership and 100 will be our own," Mehta explained.

"Right to Education Act talks about educational access to all, but we would like to take the debate to a higher level of quality with creativity as the new mantra for literacy. We are partnering with local entrepreneurs as they know the local conditions well. Our partners need to have a social sensibility along with business acumen. We will invest a lot in teacher training and ensure that the model works based on design, healthy partnership and constant review," Mehta added.

Zee Learn also runs 700 preparatory schools called Kidzees in more than 311 cities. Nitya Ramaswami, head of child development and academics of Zee Learn, was also present in the function.