



SIBAL DECRIES

HRD minister says states not doing enough to implement central policies

By Mail Today Bureau in New Delhi

UNION human resource development (HRD) minister Kapil Sibal on Friday spoke against the politicisation of education in the country. He was critical of the state governments and lamented their reluctance to reform the education system.

Citing the example of 13 key Bills of his ministry that are stuck in Parliament, Sibal, who was speaking at the India Today Aspire Education Summit 2012, made a strong case for distancing politics from education.

"Everybody is thinking of when and how we will come to power. Where is the national vision? Nothing can be done unless political parties come together and realise that education is an area of national importance and should be a priority," he said.

"I want to give degrees to students in the Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research (IISER), but I cannot because there is no political consensus in the House," he added, referring to the non-passage of the NIT Act (Amendment) Bill 2011 in the Rajya Sabha.

This means that the students of IISER in Pune and Kolkata who completed their five-year course in the summer of 2011 are left in the lurch, without any degree.

The minister, who has been on the defensive in the wake of recent disparaging reports (Programme for International Student Assessment and Assessment Survey Evaluation Research) on the state of education in India, went on to illustrate how the central government — even though it attracts the maximum flak for deficiencies in the education system — has little role to play in on-ground improvement.

The biggest challenge, he said, was to get the states to implement the reform policies introduced by the Centre. And any bid to exert pressure is misinterpreted as "interference" in

state governance.

"We (the Centre) can introduce policies and allocate funds. But it's impossible for us to monitor if a child is receiving quality education in Bihar or Orissa. The reality is that the implementation of policies happens at the state level," he said.

Calling the task of empowering 20 million children through education "herculean", Sibal said India would not be able to join the ranks of developed countries unless it created a "critical mass" of youngsters who will pursue higher education.

Currently, 16 of every 100 students in India reach university level, whereas the figure is 40 in the developed world. The gov-

ernment aims to increase the number of university-going students from 16 million to 45 million by 2020.

This gap, Sibal said, can be bridged through effective implementation of the Right to Education Act which was introduced almost two years ago. It promotes inclusivity in education and will democratise classrooms.

"The Act will create an environment to nurture that critical mass that will go to university by 2020," the minister added.

The Act will lead to efforts to admit and retain more children in schools, which would, in turn, lead to a build-up of pressure at the university level.

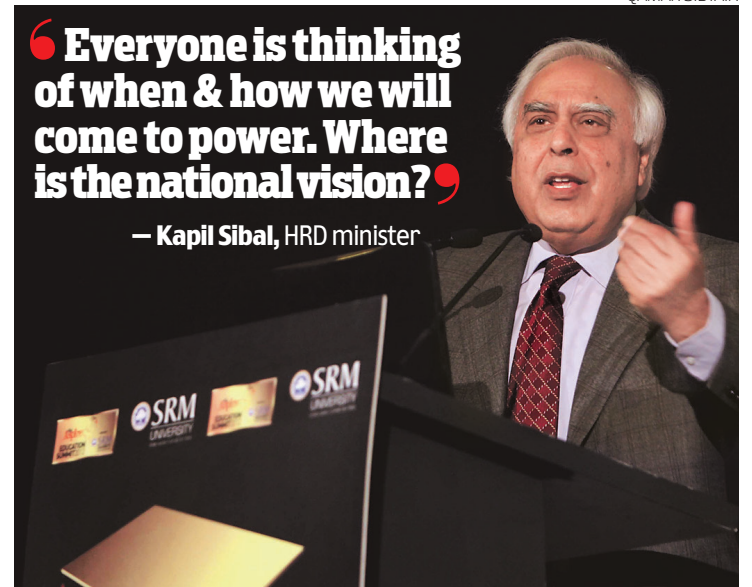
The minister also asked the states to increase their budget allocation for education and called on them, as well as the private players, to help meet the need of an additional 1,000 universities in the future.



QAMAR SIBTAIN

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— Kapil Sibal, HRD minister



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OVER 800 scholarships are earmarked for humanities at Bombay University but, according to a faculty member, it ends up receiving barely a dozen applications. Filmmaker Prakash Jha (in picture) pointed out this startling statistic as evidence of the dire state of Indian education. "We have almost forgotten the essence of education, and have started considering it the manufacturing of managers," Jha said at a panel discussion on 'Redefining the Classroom' at the India Today Aspire Education Summit 2012.

Jha, whose film *Aarakshan* covered the problems with reservations in education, said the policymakers are picking the wrong techniques to attack systemic problems. "With affirmative action, I found dissatisfaction at every level," he said. "The story of reservation never ends... politicians have to plant reservations within reservations."

He called for the government to ensure that all students have the opportunity to get the education they want. This, he said, needs to be done even if it pushes spending on education



Policymakers are finding the wrong solution

from 4 per cent of the GDP to 14.

He also decried the way education has turned almost into a commercial transaction — with teachers as service providers and students as clients. "We have learnt the art of management," Jha said. "There is a huge paucity of good universities with good teachers. People who don't get any other job end up applying for a teacher's job."

As an example of an alternative approach, Jha pointed to Super 30, a Patna-based educational initiative. The organisation, founded by mathematician Anand Kumar, selects 30 talented students from extremely poor backgrounds and prepares them for the IIT-JEE.

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'Need Doon & Mayo for poor'

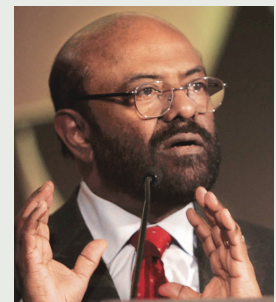
THE widening rural-urban divide is one of the biggest challenges for India's education system. India needs another technology revolution in the education system to bridge this gap, Shiv Nadar, founder of HCL Technologies, said on Friday.

"Both the urban child and the rural child have the spark, the ambition, the genius; the only difference is their access to information about the world," Nadar said in his keynote address at the India Today Aspire Education Summit 2012.

"We need a world-class institution which will create leaders out of the children who have not had a good start in life. We need schools like Doon and Mayo for the poor," Nadar said.

This 66-year-old philanthropist-educator believes the government needs to be more proactive, with a proper vision and action plan, to make good school education programmes effective.

According to him, effective information technology integration with the education system is the only way to bridge the urban-rural and digital



Shiv Nadar, the founder of HCL Technologies, pointed out the need for an IT revolution in the Indian education system.

divide. That is what policymakers have to work on. "It requires time and vision to make the change possible. Since Graham Bell came up with telephony, it took 100 years for the way the technology has impacted our lives, the way we perceive the world," Nadar said.

It was 35 years ago that Nadar had left his highly paid engineering job at DCM to set up his company in a garage, and no one could have predicted that one day he would head one of India's leading IT companies.

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