

# WANTED A REVOLUTION

Bridging the skill gap, tying up with foreign universities, making the teacher the centre of the education universe. Academics, policymakers and administrators discussed these issues at the INDIA TODAY Aspire Education Summit.



REKHA PURIE, CHAIRPERSON OF THE VASANT VALLEY SCHOOL MANAGING COMMITTEE, WITH THE WINNERS OF THE INDIA TODAY ASPIRE EDUCATION SUMMIT 2012 AWARDS. (FROM LEFT) RAJEEV SHOREY, NIIT UNIVERSITY; P.D JOSE, IIM-BANGALORE; MGHS RAJAN, MANIPAL UNIVERSITY; ARYA KUMAR, BITS PILANI; DEEPAK CHANDRA, ISB; DEEPAK DHAR, TIFR; PRAKASH JHA, FILMMAKER; RAVI PACHAMUTHU, SRM UNIVERSITY; S.C SRIVASTAVA, IIT-KANPUR; J.M KHURANA, DU; PRATEEK SHARMA, TERI; M. ASLAM, IGNOU; VIJAY THADANI, NIIT; SUDHIR K. SOPORY, JNU.

Photography by UKRAMASHARLA, VASANT VALLEY SCHOOL MANAGING COMMITTEE and CHANDRADEEP KUMAR/www.makalabloggers.com

By Dhiraj Nayyar

In 2012, 65 years after independence, one out of every four Indians remains illiterate. While considerable progress has been made on ensuring that almost every child enrolls in school, only 40 per cent of those who are admitted to primary school make it to secondary school. Just 16 out of every 100 Indians make it to university. If these statistics do not improve rapidly, India can expect a demographic disaster rather than a demographic dividend. On evidence, no country has become an economic superpower with such dismal indicators in education.

The first INDIA TODAY Aspire Education Summit held in New Delhi on January 27 brought together policy officials, academic administrators, academics, schoolteachers and other

interested stakeholders from both the private and public sector to debate the challenges that confront education in India from primary school to university. The crux of the challenge is two-fold: first, that of access, the need to get more young Indians to enter and complete primary and secondary school and then to enter and complete university. Second, is the issue of quality. It isn't enough to get them into educational institutions. It's necessary to ensure that they have access to quality learning.

In his inaugural keynote address at the summit, Union Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal was passionate about his effort to address with equal intensity the twin challenges of quantity and quality. Said Sibal, "In developed countries, 40 out of 100 students reach university. In India, only 16 in 100 do. My aim is to double India's gross enrolment ratio by 2020. That is

the only way India can fulfil its economic dreams." He was quick to point out that the existing number of 604 universities and 31,000 colleges were grossly inadequate to accommodate a doubling of the gross enrolment ratio. Sibal argued that the Centre did not have enough resources to meet the entire demand. "Education is also a state subject, but most states are not allocating enough funds for the sector," he said. The Union minister's attempt to shift some of the blame for India's dismal education statistics onto state governments seemed to go against his other central argument that education must be taken away from the clutches of the political system.

Speaking before Sibal while opening the summit, INDIA TODAY Editorial Director M.J. Akbar made a strong case for depoliticising education. "Education is not a mere department of the

Government of India. It is a sacred trust. It is the one national responsibility which tempts me to suggest that it should not be run as a ministry but as a constitutional authority, in the manner of the Election Commission, beyond partisan lines inherent in the political system we have," he said. "Mass education", said Akbar "is the final challenge of the trust with destiny that was promised by our first and greatest prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru."

In a second keynote address, entrepreneur Shiv Nadar, the founder of one of India's top IT companies, HCL, spoke about his philanthropic initiative in taking "elite education" to rural India. Nadar highlighted the need to create institutions that would deliver a "stunning impact" through the students they nurture and act as role model institutions for others. "The Indian Institutes of Technology are the best examples of

## Winning Streak

They walked away with the awards in various categories

### Greenest Campus NIIT UNIVERSITY

Most Innovative Use of Technology  
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, KANPUR

Best Teaching Practices  
IGNOU AND INDIAN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, HYDERABAD

Most Innovative Curriculum  
TERI UNIVERSITY

Best Placement Cell  
IIM, BANGALORE

Best Hostel Facilities  
BITS PILANI AND MANIPAL UNIVERSITY

Best Extra-curricular Activities  
DELHI UNIVERSITY

Most Socially Conscious Campus  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

Best Research Facilities  
TATA INSTITUTE OF FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH, MUMBAI

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Kapil Sibal  
Union HRD minister

