

HRD minister Kapil Sibal wants to throw mugging out of school education. We ask experts why this is important and how it can be achieved.



S. SURENDER

From rote to learning



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SINCE HIS appointment four weeks ago, human resources development minister Kapil Sibal has been receiving a lot of free advise

and attention. The reason is simple — he has commenced a new innings with bold action-talk that is atypical of people in his position. He has spoken of a lot of change: deregulating education, reforming higher education, investigating deemed universities, revamp-

ents and the teachers. Mr Sibal wants "cramming and relentless mugging" to go so that schools become centres of "joyful learning". He has also talked of a more progressive grading system with more emphasis on internal assessments as opposed to one-time annual high-stakes examinations that further the cult of mindless memorisation. Sweet melody to any sensible ear.

But most schools are not like this. The "system" is built around accumulating vast amounts of information as quickly as possible and testing at annual intervals.

The dream and vision of a meaningful and rounded school education that is relevant to real life is not new. J. Krishnamurthy spoke of education without fear, Sri Aurobindo advocated "free-progress", and Mahatma Gandhi's *Nai-Talim* emphasised vocational skills and dignity of labour.

Recently, the NCERT's National Curricular Framework 2005 made a substantial case around two common sense principles: make the classroom content more useful to children in real life; shift away from tiresome rote learning to methods th-

children play with bulging droplets on 50-paise coins or watch open-mouthed at a live demonstration of an insect "walking" on water.

In a rapidly changing world, "knowledge" itself has a shorter shelf-life. What will remain more useful to children is the ability and hunger to learn. This is better achieved by a more active-learning process which involves doing, discussing, questioning and cooperating with one another. Just as children will have to do when they get to the workplace. If you visit Kiran Sethi's Riverside

100-day plan

- ▶ Scrap Class X boards as they are an unwarranted source of anxiety in a system that's overloaded anyway.
- ▶ Replace marks with an evaluation system based on percentiles and grades in Classes IX and X.
- ▶ Do away with state boards and have a single uniform board across the country.

dom are harder to manage.

So the only thing that will work is a better mousetrap. A complete last-mile solution that shows each teacher how to teach each concept, in each class, to each child; that specifies assessment, activities, text, resources and gives them training and coaching, and over time lets them become the experts.

iDiscoveri is doing it in 150 schools across the country and seeing results. Our research over the past few years shows up to 20 percentage point difference in the learning results of children when taught

"zero cram" teaching is hard