

inspired india

DAY 3 EDUCATION



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INDIA CAN WILL
OPPORTUNITY FROM ADVERSITY

Hindustan Times
IDEA NATION
Let's Do It
Do you know of anyone who has overcome seemingly insurmountable odds? Let us know. We will profile the person so others can be inspired.
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■ A CLASS APART: Kindergarten students at New Little Scholars School, one of the many low-cost private schools in Hyderabad. The school is run by the Reddys, who set up a trust and constructed the building after taking a home loan. You cannot currently get a loan to set up a school in India.
KRISHNENDU HALDER/HT

Let India Inc into the classroom

STARTING A PRIVATE SCHOOL is a battle. Yet, about half the students in government schools can barely read. Here's how we can open up the sector and give all our children a chance

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Deepika (15), the daughter of a taxi driver who died this year, wants to be an engineer. But first, there is karate to conquer. Deepika is enjoying Class 10 education and a lot else at a Hyderabad private school with fees of Rs 150 a month. The city is teeming with them — 1,000 or so low-fee private schools exist across the old city of Hyderabad, all in a fierce competition to offer better education and other facilities. That could well become the story of India, if the government makes it easier for people to set up private schools in a country acutely short of schools. Banks do not give loans to set up a private school. It currently takes 15 tedious certificates to start one. So across the country, there is just one private school for every 13 government schools. The pay scales at these schools are often about one-sixth what government teachers will be making after the 6th Pay Commission. And, despite the Centre spending Rs 44,528-crore annually on education, the government's report card is anything but inspiring. Only about 53 per cent of students in government schools can read at their age level, as opposed to 68 per cent in

private schools, according to a recent study by NGO Pratham. And less than half of the children registered in government schools — 40 per cent, according to a World Bank study — make it past Class 5. What the government needs to do is ease regulations and step back, allowing the market dynamic to play out. As it did in Hyderabad, touching Deepika's life in a way unimaginable when she was at a government-run Telugu-medium school until Class 4. Teachers didn't come to school or were disinterested. Students didn't come to school or were disinterested. But her life changed when a solid white monolith appeared in her neighbourhood on the outskirts of

Hyderabad. At her New Little Scholars school, things were different: There was a computer lab, karate classes and after-hours tutorials. And when her father died, leaving her family of five struggling, her school applied for scholarships on her behalf. Human Resources Development Minister Kapil Sibal agrees that there is a need for greater private participation, but there is no talk yet of easing regulations and allowing low-cost schools to flourish. "Participation by the non-government sector is the best way to move forward in education," he tells HT. "That way, all the stakeholders are involved. But the parameters within which they will exist are yet to be decided."

THE BATTLE FOR STUDENTS
The change could begin with banks offering loans for building schools. "We built our school in 2003, with a home loan," says K. Suryakala Reddy, who started New Little Scholars with her husband. The couple has since started two more low-cost schools. Experts fear that easing regulations will result in a decline in quality. But the Hyderabad example shows that more schools only means more competition and better standards. Take Mohammed Saleem. The 25-year-old MBA graduate has recently started a school that charges Rs 100 per month. "The only way to survive here is to give my students good quality at a low price. I've introduced assignment sheets, free study material and enrolled my teachers for training," he says. Sounds good. But if one were to go strictly by the rules, none of these schools would exist. Government rules say that all private schools employ at least four teachers with a BEd degree, and that they have a 1,000-sq-metre playground. That sets off a cycle of corruption, and we recommend that several of these rules — which are impossible to adhere to in an urban setup — be eased. The government should also allow private players to run schools, and not just trusts or charities. "The government can ensure quality by starting an accreditation system for private schools," says James Tooley, a University of Newcastle professor who has been studying low-cost schools.

THE VOUCHER DEBATE
Other lobbyists, like the Centre for Civil Society (CCS), are also asking for a voucher system, through which every child will get a certain amount per year which can be used towards school fees, even at a private school. A pilot programme by the centre in Delhi has shown remarkable results. Of the 408 children who were given vouchers, 93 per cent showed marked improvements in learning, while 53 per cent of the parents have begun to invest more money in education. The voucher system may even end up being cheaper for the government. India currently spends Rs 5,500 per child per year on education, while fees at low-cost private schools are rarely more than Rs 3,600 per year. But neither vouchers nor fewer regulations are anywhere on the government's 100-day plan. "The voucher programme will work only if there are lots of schools to choose from," says Subhash Khuntia, joint secretary for education in the central government. "In most rural areas, that is not the case." "I wish my *didi* (elder sister) could also get a voucher," says Rahul (8), who is now at a private school with the help of CCS. "She left her school because she didn't like it. My new school is so much better."

aroundtheworld

THE NETHERLANDS
About 70 per cent of students attend private independent schools. The government funds *bijzondere* (special) schools, which are run by independent non-profit boards, on condition that they charge no more than public schools do and otherwise abide by the same rules.

CHILE
Since 1980, private education subsidised with vouchers has grown considerably in Chile. A new subsidy law

provided for allocation of resources on a per-pupil basis to private and civic schools. A national test in 1988 indicated that the quality of education was considerably higher in subsidised private institutes than civic schools.

USA
The first publicly funded American voucher programme was the Cleveland Scholarship Program. The voucher provided up to 90 per cent of a student's tuition, up to a maximum of \$2,250 — just over a third of the cost of putting the child through a government school.

idea nation

EDUCATION FOR ALL

THE PROBLEM
The Central government spends about Rs 40,000 crore a year on school education, but the quality of instruction remains dismal. Teacher and student absenteeism are rampant; about 60 per cent of students drop out by Class 5.

- HT'S FIX**
- Allow greater private participation in the school sector by reducing red tape.
 - There must be greater devolution of power, so the government gives more grants for independent bodies to run government schools. For example, NGOs (like the Mumbai Public System), companies (like Educamp in Punjab) or local panchayats.
 - There must be more independently conducted teacher-training programmes, with more funding towards teacher training rather than high salaries with low accountability.

yourvoice

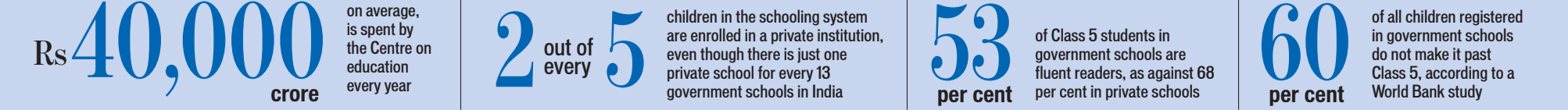
Doctors that smile are vital
I really liked 'At the OPD, a Cinderella story' very much and fully agree with you. Hospitals should also aim at outsourcing management to private institutions. A second vital aspect is training of the staff in service and soft skills. Beside manner is very important and needs to be really drilled into employees through training programmes. Maybe the training could be outsourced to professional institutes too.
Dr Shankar Narang, GM (Operations & Quality), Paras Hospitals, Gurgaon

Pay govt doctors better
The government must focus on changing the attitude of its doctors. And I think one way to do this would be to pay them better. Low pay no doubt causes much frustration, which they then take out on their hapless patients.
L.K. Choudhry, New Delhi

A pleasure to read
I really learnt a lot from 'At the OPD, a Cinderella story'. It was a pleasure to read.
Himmat Singh, student

TALK TO US
Have an idea of your own for the government? E-mail us at change@hindustantimes.com

figureconscious



GOVERNMENT SPEAK KAPIL SIBAL

'PRIVATE PARTICIPATION THE BEST WAY FORWARD'

What is your view of private participation in the education sector?
Participation by the non-government sector is the best way to move forward in education. That way, all the stakeholders are involved. The parameters within which this will function are yet to be decided by the government.
Currently, only trusts and NGOs are allowed to be partners. Should the sector be opened up to companies also?
There is a judicial constraint on allow-

ing private players to start schools and be partners in PPPs. However, this is very limiting. It's something that the government needs to address and get past.
Couldn't the number of licences be reduced — right now, there are 15?
Some of these licenses, like having running water or electricity, are required. But yes, there are others, like the requirement of a large playground, that need to be re-examined with the advent of urbanisation.

EXPERT SPEAK

Private education has huge opportunity in India since the public system is not meeting the demands of parents. However, trying to start a school in India is a nightmare as there is a lot of red tape. While some of the regulations are necessary, a far lighter touch would be better.
JAMES TOOLEY, professor, University of Newcastle UK

The government, instead of making it easy to open a school, has made it harder. We need to let private schools flourish. We need to get rid of the provision that allows only non-profit bodies to start schools. Eventually, competition will force everyone to offer quality education.
BALADEVAN RANGARAJU, associate director, Centre for Civil Society

