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Urban planning, sustainable development, town planning, with words as these flying around one could be forgiven for thinking they are attending a conference on urban development and not a civic fest that features tiny 13-year-olds! Bala Janaagraha Civic Fest that showcased some amazing projects done by class 8 school children clearly demonstrated that active citizenship can begin from a very early age.

The South Zone fest on Saturday, January 3 saw the participation of six teams; The East West School, and Govt Boys' High school, from Bengaluru, Chinmaya Vidyalaya, Thiruvananthapuram, Sri Sankara Senior Secondary School, Chennai, Little Flower High School, Narakkal, Kochi, and Government High School, Bollaram, Hyderabad.

Bala Janaagraha project encourages students to work in teams and choose one road near their schools or homes, carry out a survey, analyse the results, understand its positives and negatives, and try to find solutions. Civic Fests are a platform at which, students, creatively employing power point presentations, skits, role plays, slogans, and jingles, put forth their projects, and the probable solutions to a panel of Judges. The South Zone Fest panel comprised eminent personalities that included Rudramani, Executive Director and Head, Dell India Research and Development, Bangalore, Vivek Menon, Managing Director, Invicus, and Syed Sultan Ahmed, Managing Director, Edu Media India Private Ltd.

East West School was heralded as the winner, and will participate in the National Fest on February 6.

Following are the participating schools.

1. **Government Boys' High School, Malleshwaram:** The opening act of the fest itself raised the bar with the high octane performance of the students. Their performance peppered with props, and slogans, pointed towards the harmful effects of CFC and plastic bags. The little change makers explained that they met MLA Dr Ashwath Narayan, and the latter promised all help possible.
2. **East West School, Basvanagudi:** Students from this school took innovation and creativity to a different level. Their entire project was presented in form of a radio programme. Not only did the students articulate the problems the street adopted by them, Mavalli Main Road, was facing, but also came up with a futuristic plan that involved urging the Corporator and Mayor to look into purchasing Peizo tiles that could convert muscular energy into kinetic energy to power streetlights!
3. **Sri Sankara Secondary School, Chennai:** Faulty streetlights, snakes, mosquitoes, lack of public toilets, were some of the problems faced by the road chosen by these students. They pointed out that they had set the change-ball rolling and met up the local Corporator who immediately asked her colleagues to look into the issues presented.
4. **Government High School, Bollaram, Hyderabad:** Bollaram in Hyderabad is famous for being the winter retreat of the President of India. It is also famous for having terrible roads. This fact was creatively presented to the judges by the industrious students of the Government school.
5. **Little Flower High School, Narakkal, Kochi:** In spite of being a small town, Narakkal in Kochi faces civic problems similar to a big city. With the help of videos, and power point presentations, the children spoke about those issues, and their probable solutions.
6. **Chinmaya Vidyalaya, Vazhuthakad, Thiruvananthapuram:** This school took the competition to a new level by not only clearly stating the problems faced by their road, but also making their performance interactive by asking the audience to take an oath to keep their neighborhoods, and cities clean.

The schools' performances made judging the fest an extremely difficult and an unenviable task. "There's a whole lot to learn from these kids. East West School's idea of importing Peizo tiles to power streetlights was an alien concept to me! Their passion is amazing, and through the questions we asked them, it is clear they genuinely care," says Rudramani.

Echoing same thoughts, Syed Sultan adds, "Wonder why they even grow up! There are two things, living and livelihood, and our education teaches them livelihood not living. The society we live in kills their passion. We need an education system that will not allow this passion to die!"

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