

## The power of arguments

Workshops, debates and training take over Calcutta as different schools take part in the second edition of Debating Excellence 2025, an initiative by the **Calcutta Debating Circle** in association with **The Telegraph, Young Metro**. International mentors add sting to the event...



Participants showcase their certificates, along with the volunteers and mentors of CDC, after the exhibition debate at The Newtown School



A workshop in progress at Garden High School



Students participate an open workshop at Rotary Sadan



Participants at the final CDC debate at Narula Institute of Technology

**Calcutta:** A high-octane exchange of ideas, compelling arguments and creative minds marked the second edition of Debating Excellence 2025, an initiative by the Calcutta Debating Circle (CDC) in association with **The Telegraph, Young Metro**, Narula Institute of Technology and the JIS Group.

Held across several schools in Calcutta from June 28 to July 8, the initiative aimed at giving teenagers a firmer voice, some argumentative power and a confidence boost. It culminated in a final showdown at the Narula Institute of Technology on a rain-soaked afternoon but nothing could dampen the fiery spirit of the young debaters.

Over 10 days, CDC brought the power of reason and rhetoric to the city's schools with an enriching series of workshops, followed by intra-school debates.

Mentors from Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, and Kings College, London were flown in to teach, guide and inspire. They included Isaac Ohringer, a history student at the University of Cambridge; Hunter, a history and literature student at Harvard University; Jordan Anderson, the winner of several international debating competitions; Zachary Fleesler, an Oxford University student of politics and philosophy; debating coach Heather Robinson from the UK; and Elias, a graduate in ethics, politics and economics from Yale University.

Their sessions weren't just lessons in debate; they were lessons in listening, critical thinking and empathetic articulation. Some of the participating schools were M.C. Kejriwal Vidyapeeth, Garden High School, Gems Akademia International School and Indus Valley World School. Workshops were held here, the space buzzing with intellectual curiosity.

The students were very engaged and respectful. It means a lot that they came up with their points so confidently in front of so many people. In my book, the workshop was a great success, said Elias. Fellow mentor Fleesler added: It was great to work with students who love debate. They listened so carefully and spoke with conviction the experience was a very happy one for me.

Each workshop was uniquely designed to be interactive, humorous and thoughtful. One popular activity saw students take part in role play from Christopher Nolan to Thomas Edison trapped in a hot air balloon, having to argue for their survival. Should private tuitions be abolished? Should exams be banned? Motions such as these led to real-world reflections, while judges and mentors pushed students to question their reasoning.

The exhibition debates were equally intense. At M.C. Kejriwal Vidyapeeth, students tackled the motions Corporal punishment should be reinstated for minor crimes and In a developing country like India, we need technically qualified people, not artists or performers.

The mentors guided students through techniques of framing arguments, rebuttals and logical structuring. Debates play an important role in nurturing students' confidence. After school, they should know how to present their judgments impactfully, said Anderson.

The workshops ended with the students becoming more confident. The session at our school helped me conquer my fear of speaking in front of a crowd. Now I know what it means to listen closely and respond with clarity, said Sarthak Bose, a Class IX student of Gems Akademia International School.

It was eye-opening to listen to such a variety of perspectives on one motion, said Meera Banerjee, a Class XI student from The Newtown School. The way the arguments evolved and were countered taught me a lot about structure and presence, she added.

Every day, one standout speaker was chosen by a panel of judges. These chosen ones eventually locked horns in the grand finale at Narula Institute of Technology on July 8. The motion for the final was: This house believes that adults should trust teenagers to make their own life decisions.

Ten teenage finalists, under-terred by the downpour, delivered a robust duel of logic and emotion. Dr Kunal Sarkar, a cardiac surgeon and CDC trustee and Pradeep Gooptu, writer and fellow trustee were there on the final day at Narula Institute of Technology to support the young debaters. The session was moderated by debating coach Heather Robinson from the UK and Mitadru Dasgupta of the CDC.

The judging panel featured Ohringer, Anderson and Fleesler, the mentors who had flown down from.

Garden High Schools Arshia Datta delivered a searing final speech against the motion, challenging the notion of teenage independence. Yesterday I saw *The Good Doctor* and I wanted to be a doctor. Then I saw *Suits* and I wanted to be a lawyer, she quipped, drawing laughter and nods. Her sharp observations on herd mentality and the fickleness of teenage minds earned her the Best Speaker award. Teenagers have preconceived notions. They'd rather listen to Google than their parents, she said, stressing that parents often protect their children's individuality rather than suppress it.

The event was also a tribute to Sandip Chatterjee, one of CDC founders. A debate was held between CDC members and the guest mentors at the Calcutta Club on July 5, in his honour.

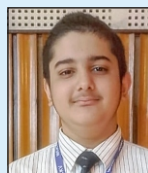
**Sriparna Bandyopadhyay**  
YM intern



This was a transformative experience. I gained valuable insights into developing strong arguments and effectively countering my opponents. I would love to participate again

**Rishabh Rathie**

Class X, M.C. Kejriwal Vidyapeeth



This event helped me discover a new side of myself. Anderson's guidance on public speaking was invaluable. I think I am a more confident person now

**Ambar Pradhan**

Class XI, M.C. Kejriwal Vidyapeeth



The CDC debate workshop was a truly memorable event. Engaging group activities built teamwork, critical thinking, and speaking skills.

Kind, supportive mentors guided us throughout. The final debate showcased everything we learned, making for an enriching and fun experience

**Sanchari Malkhandi**

Class IX, Garden High School



Debates help students speak their mind and articulate their thoughts in a way that leaves an impact. More students should take part in the activity

**Satabdi Bhattacharjee**

principal, The Newtown School



Today's students are easily misled. Debates teach them assertiveness and how to react thoughtfully diplomatically, if needed. It is a must-have life skill

life skill

**Indrani Mukherjee**

teacher, Garden High School



Calcutta Debating Circle was formed to practise the art of conversation and listening. We promote debating not just for competition, but as a life skill

life skill

**Pradeep Gooptu**

trustee, CDC



It's a great pleasure to welcome our visitors for the second year! Seeing them repeatedly turns them into cherished friends. I've had some of my best times with them in London recently. This is truly one of the most anticipated times of the year, not just for our students, but for CDC too

**Dr Kunal Sarkar**

cardiac surgeon and CDC trustee