

Rule breakers 'must' for social progress



Debaters from The Newtown School and Harrow School, London, with (centre) moderators Pradeep Gooptu and Sandip Chatterjee of the Calcutta Debating Circle on Friday. (Right) The audience at The Newtown School

Pictures by Bishwarup Dutta



JHINUK MAZUMDAR

New Town: Mahatma Gandhi was a rule breaker and if he had not broken the rules set by the British, "India would not be the nation it is today", said a student from Harrow School, London, on Friday.

The student, Edward Blunt, was speaking for the motion "More rules encourage more breaking of rules" at the International Inter School Debating Festival, in association with The Telegraph, at The Newtown School.

"We have many rule breakers to thank for social progress," said Edward, who, apart from referring to Gandhi, also talked about Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela.

"There will always be rule breakers and there will always be rules that would be broken. Too many rules affect innocent people. Too many rules infringe on human rights, rights of expression, rights of communication," said Edward, who won best speaker for the motion.

While Edward focused on

lessons from history, Aditi Mishra from The Newtown School, speaking against the motion, said schools can no longer use corporal punishment, thanks to new rules.

"When I listen to my family telling me about corporal punishment, I am rather surprised. These are the days when teachers are barred by rules asking them not to give such punishments or even use hurtful words by way of rebuke," Aditi, adjudged best speaker against the motion, said.

Some new rules also make life easier, she said, referring to the LGBT judgment.

The teams were mixed, comprising participants from both schools, giving them the opportunity to collaborate.

The debate was moderated by Sandip Chatterjee and Pradeep Gooptu of the Calcutta Debating Circle, the joint organisers of the festival.

The head of The Newtown School believes in throwing challenges to her students and giving them cross-cultural exposure.

"When they meet people

who are perhaps better than them and groomed into this culture of debating for many years, my students will be able to identify their weaknesses or areas they have to work upon," said Satabdi Bhat-tacharjee, principal of the school.

"At the same time they will be able to appreciate their own strengths. The moment you throw challenges at them, they get to discover their strengths, get to know how good they are and they come out fantastic," she said.

Friday's debate was followed by a workshop by Harrow's debating coach Shaughan Dolan. He told the students that he was not teaching them debating but leadership. When they grow up they have to start winning arguments, he said.

"Debating is something that you do daily in your life. You are going to have conversations where you have to persuade people. You have to accept criticism when you are wrong. You are going to have to engage with people. Life is a debate."