

Girls speak their way to ace leadership summit

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Followers mug up facts, leaders map new worlds of thought. And going by the results of the grand finale of Leadership Challenge at Tata Auditorium, Jamshedpur on Wednesday, girl power will lead the world of tomorrow.

Two girls — Samona Kundu of Hill Top School and Spruha Biswas of Rajendra Vidyalaya — won in a closely contested final where original thinking and persuasive articulation ruled. Bangalore-based Giri Balasubramaniam, affectionately known as Pickbrain in quizzing circles and the head of Greycaps, India's second-largest quiz company, was the moderator at the unique event held for the first time in the city, hosted by Hill Top School with The Telegraph as the media partner.

Apart from the two girls, the other six finalists were Loyola School's Harsh Valbhav, Kerala Samajam Model School's Madhurima Majhi, Sacred Heart Convent School's R. Sanjana, Carmel Junior College's Shubham Tejaswi Shahi, DBMS English School's Shriya Agarwal and Gulmohur High School's Vaishali Anand.

Unlike normal quizzing, there were no right or wrong answers. Situations were subjective and students had to think on their feet.

For participants as well as the three judges — Amit Chatterjee, advisor to Tata Steel managing director, Lakshmi Banerjee, Kolhan University pro-vice chancellor and Jitu Singh, senior faculty member at XLRI — it was a night to remember.

A format that combined debate and group discussions, the first round "Kickstart" al-

lowed students to speak on one topic, starting with the phrase "I woke up to tomorrow..."

Then came "Walk the Talk", where students were given unique situations.

Participants also had to find a suitable leader for a world without borders where people had equal opportunities, privileges and wages.

If some found in US President Barack Obama an ideal candidate to head this utopia, others begged to disagree.

Repartees and quick quips from Pickbrain, known for his trademark humour, as well as the participants, kept the audience in splits whenever the discussion got too solemn.

"The unique platform showcased the fact that students had to be himself or herself. It was about expressing one's personality and opinions in the most impressive way possible," M.J. Xavier, IIM-Ranchi director and the event's chief guest, said, sounding clearly impressed.

The parameters behind choosing the winner were communication, fluency of language, clarity of thought, listening skills, the ability to negotiate one's opposition, awareness and knowledge, empathy and grace.

About 32 students from 17 city-based schools had participated in the verbal duel in the preliminary rounds on Tuesday. They comprised a group discussion and a closed-door personal interview at the host school, conducted by the Greycaps team from Bangalore.

The Leadership Challenge is largely inspired by *The Big Fight*, a top verbal duel aired by a leading national news channel.

In its maiden edition in Jamshedpur, the city's girls proved that they could fight to win with words, gloves off, but thinking caps on.



Students take part in Leadership Challenge organised by Hill Top School at Tata Auditorium on Wednesday. (Bhola Prasad)