The second edition of The New Indian Express' annual education conclave opened doors to the country's vice president, ministers, bureaucrats, academics, corporates and students for two days of debates and discussions. This special issue takes you through the ideas that were exchanged.
CONSTRUCTIVE IN TONE, TENOR AND CHARACTER

Eminent personalities racked their brains and agreed and disagreed with each other on this year’s theme, ‘Schooling India for tomorrow’

SHTAM BALASUBRAMANIAN | CHENNAI

ThinkEdu Conclave 2014, the annual two-day education conclave conducted by The New Indian Express, saw a grand play out in Chennai on January 30 and 31. The conclave stuck true to the vision outlined in the inaugural session, featuring more constructive discussions and exchanges than mere screaming matches and blame games. Taking part in these discussions were leading faces from government, politics, academia, education management, non-profit organisations and corporates, getting down to the details of what all education in this country, and how these issues can be addressed.

The conclave saw the participation of eminent persons like Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari, anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare, Union Human Resource Development Minister MM Pallam Raju, Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, Union New and Renewable Energy Minister Farooq Abdullah, former Union Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss, former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Rajya Sabha MP TK Rangarajan, former UP minister Abhishek Mishra, BJP national vice president Shripati Irani, Congress spokesperson Rajeev Gowda and Rajya Sabha MP Arun Shourie.

Infosys executive vice-chairman Kris Gopalakrishnan, TVS Motor Company CMD Venu Srinivasan, Bharatiya Mahila Bank CMD Usha Ananthasubramaniam, former IPS officer Kiran Bedi, former NCRB chairman JS Rajput, Bharati Foundation co-chairman Rakesh Mittal, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch co-convenor S Gurumurthy, SASTRA University’s dean-planning and development S Vaidhyasubramaniam, Indian School of Business deputy dean Savita Mahajan, NITT University Vijay K Thadhani, Galgotias University Chancellor Sunil Galgotia, IIT University Chancellor G V Vasanadhan, IIT Patna University Chancellor YK Bhushan, former NASSCOM president Som Mittal, CavinKare CMD CK Ranganath, IIT Madras Director Bhaskar Ramamurthi and actor Aamir Khan were also among those who spoke at the conclave.

They took part in panel discussions that ranged across two whole days, laying a few tough issues concerning school and higher education cutting across the lines that divide the private and public sectors. A large amount of focus was also given to education and training relevant to the students not only in terms of learning but also in terms of what is required by industry. Speakers however underlined the need for more than just the technical skills required for employability, and called for greater focus on personality building and societal consciousness.

Among the topics taken up for discussion were the state of the Indian school and higher education, the need for educational reform, holistic education, role of the private sector, need for increased push from corporate sector, role of PPP projects, brain drain, challenges of education and training and self-image of Indian institutions.

The tone of the conclave was set right at the beginning by The New Indian Express’ Editorial Director Prabhu Chawla. Even as he acknowledged the various problems and flaws in the system, he set forth the vision for the conclave. “There...
'EDUCATION MUST NURTURE A CHILD'S INNATE CURIOSITY'

Suggesting that all faiths be taught in school, Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev warned, however, not to impose doctrine but encourage free thinking.

GUHAMBIRI RAJAGOPAL / CHENNAI

Education in true sense is a tool to expand human perspectives and, if possible, human consciousness," according to the founder of Isha Foundation, Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev. "Today, everyone has chosen to use education to produce goods and services to prop up the corporate world, individuals being viewed as a mere tool to serve a larger purpose of the industrial complacency." The spiritual guru was speaking on the topic, "Should faiths be taught in a child's education?"

Setting the tone for his electrifying discourse, he remarked at the end of a students' debate on the topic: "We are putting people in isolation. The only one left is leadership."

The guru remarked: "Anyone can gather two people and make a railway line or road and call it a leader. But a leader is someone who makes a common happen, not stay."

"Instead, he pointed out, "Government calling for hustlers or calling on the street calling for discards. This is the British-ruled country anymore. You don't need to protest in this manner anymore." Mahatma Gandhi was successful because of the circumstances that wrenched a hold of British at the time, which, the Sadguru felt, were not the same anymore.

According to him, a leader need not be someone who can control thousands or millions of people or running a billion. A leader is someone who is willing to do what is truly needed.

Asserting that it was his duty to speak to people who produced great societies, he said the education system should encourage a sense of curiosity, which would filter groups who act without reason. On the other hand, in a child is simply protected and nurtured, it is only natural that human intelligence would wonder, "What is life about?"

Spirituality is not a set of dogmas but a love for truth, and should be nurtured in education. Should faiths be taught to children at school? Yes, he said. All major faiths must be taught under the curriculum. However, faiths should not be imposed on students by the community. If there were multiple forms of worship, the same can be expected in education. Every child should be exposed to all faiths and must be allowed the freedom of choice.

Describing English as a "passport" to get people out of their "social and economic prison," Sadguru said inspired children in Isha Vidhya schools run by his Isha Foundation in rural areas were taught the language and computer skills.

Talking about the Isha Home School, a residential school for children who can afford it, he said: "The school has children aged 6-12, and trained and learned under the same roof. Each home, having 10 students, was cared for by house-parents and teachers. The multi-age environment ensured a holistic atmosphere. "A dynamic curriculum, free from the pressure of assessment, allows for an atmosphere of inspired teaching and passionate learning," he added. Under the present system in the country, education, which should be inspiring, was a heap of information. It is a matter to be looked upon as more reliable, he warned.

Jaggi Vasudev遭遇学生挑战者

A member of the audience presented a question to the students.

Sadguru Vasudev stresses the need for practical exposure...children in Isha Vidhya schools run by his Isha Foundation in rural areas were taught the language and computer skills.

Andrew Hazare and Kiran Bedi enter the venue. Also seen are Bharti Mittal, vice-chairman and managing director, Bharti Enterprises, Anna Hazare lights the lamp along with Bhart Bhushan, the first dental student from the 'Teach the Children' campaign. Mahesh Kumbar Sonbalsa, chairman and managing director, Express Publications Madurai Limited, looks on. Students gather around for photographs with Anna Hazare, Prabhoomi Chauwala, editorial director, TNM, website chief Harish Anand. Afternoon school books on. A delegate interacts with Anupam Kher. B Vaidyanathaswamy, dean, planning and development, SASTRA University, speaks to Jaggi Vasudev. Jaggi Vasudev, Kiran Bedi and Shashikumar Ayyar pose for the camera. Bharti Mittal in conversation with Kiran Bedi. Inspired students swarm around Kiran Bedi for a keepsake click.