

Checkmate against the odds

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Calcutta: Pint-sized Sudip Dutta, all of nine, needed two chairs to reach the height of the chessboard.

That was not the only hurdle he had to overcome. The boy from Asansol has lost 80% of his vision. On Monday, Sudip participated in a chess meet for the differently abled to mark International Chess Day. More than 100 players turned up, and most of them were visually impaired.

Specially designed chess pieces, with distinct shapes and carvings, allow visually impaired players to tell the king from the queen and the rook from the knight by touch.

For Sudip, one of the youngest participants, the chessboard has been a familiar companion since he was four. Visually impaired since birth, the Class IV student of Asansol Braille Academy checkmated his opponent in 20 minutes.



Participants in the chess meet at the Kolkata Centre For Creativity on Monday. Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

"I love chess because it is the only sport I can play independently. I also love cricket, but I cannot stay in the sun for long," Sudip said at the Kolkata Centre for Creativity (KCC) in Anandapur, which hosted the meet in collaboration with the ladies' wing of the business chamber FICCI.

Among the participants was 23-year-old Megha Chakraborty from Dum Dum, who is preparing for the World Chess Championship in Greece in October. Visually

impaired, she won international bronze and silver medals at the age of 16.

"My inspiration is Viswanathan Anand. I want to build my career in chess because it gives me confidence," she said.

Students from Asansol Blind School, Behala Blind School, Lighthouse for the Blind, Nabadwip Blind School and Jadavpur University also took part in the tournament.

For many participants, chess is more than a competi-

tive sport. It sharpens concentration, builds confidence and offers a close-knit community.

Prasant O Rao, 16, from Bidhanagar in Siliguri, has been playing since Class V.

"My favourite piece is the knight because it can surprise an opponent when they least expect it," he said.

Niloy Chakraborty, coach of Bengal's visually impaired and deaf chess teams, said the growing turnout reflected rising interest in the sport.

"This year we had more than 100 participants, which shows that the interest in the sport is growing. Platforms like these bring differently abled players into the mainstream and give them opportunities to compete, learn and be recognised," he said.

"We hope the tournament continues to encourage wider participation while recognising the determination, skill and achievements of every player," said Richa Agarwal, chairperson of KCC.