

SCHOOLS SEE SOARING INTEREST ACROSS AGES

Young minds make their move to chess

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: Chess is fast emerging as one of the most popular co-curricular activities in schools, with principals saying an increasing number of students are taking up the game.

The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) organised a zonal-level chess tournament last month that drew 270 students from 31 schools, up from 160 participants last year, organisers said.

"Chess is gaining popularity among school students. As the number of participants increased, the council introduced the zonal round to give more students an opportunity to compete," said Sanchita Biswas, principal of St Paul's Mission School.

The school has hosted the tournament for two consecutive years. The top performers in the zonal round qualify for the regional round.

This year, boys and girls competed in three age categories — Under-14, Under-17 and Under-19. Participating schools included La Martiniere for Boys, Loreto Convent Entally, Calcutta Boys' School and Union Chapel School.

"It is heartening to see a generation often described as the 'screen generation', with a supposedly shrinking atten-

tion span, taking to a mind sport that demands sustained concentration," Biswas said.

St Paul's Mission School introduced chess last year and has already enrolled nearly 100 students.

"Seeing the demand, we have engaged professional coaches to train them," Biswas said.

Sri Sri Academy offers chess as a club activity and has 102 students enrolled this year. Among the individual sports offered by the school, chess has the highest participation.

"The popularity of chess has grown over the last three years. Because of the large number of students, we have had to divide them into batches. The game requires individual attention, which means we need multiple classrooms," said Gargi Banerjee, principal of Sri Sri Academy.

Modern High School for Girls has been offering chess as a club activity for several years. School authorities said students have steadily improved and are now formidable competitors.

"The inclination to pursue a particular game depends on an individual's temperament. Over the years, we have seen our girls excel at chess," said Devi Kar, director of Modern High School for Girls.

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Students compete in the CISCE zonal-level chess tournament at St Paul's Mission School

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School heads said CISCE's expansion of games and tournaments has encouraged students pursuing individual sports.

"It provides exposure to students involved in individual sports such as chess, shooting, swimming and karate. Earlier, the focus

Chess moves

was largely on team sports. Now, students pursuing individual disciplines also feel motivated to compete," an official of Loreto Convent Entally said.

At Central Modern School in Baranagar, chess began as a lunchtime pastime before evolving into a formal activity.

"We noticed that students were showing a keen interest in the game and wanted it to be offered as an extracurricular activity. We introduced it in the 2025-26 academic session, and our students are now participating in tournaments," said Sangeeta Basu, vice-principal of Central Modern School.