

# A conversation on the future of Earth

## Chapters to change, one step at a time

**THE LESSON:** Climate action is no longer just a chapter to be taught, but a habit to be built. Across schools, educators are connecting classroom learning with hands-on activities, disaster preparedness and everyday choices



(From left) Sharmila Bose, Joseph Emmanuel, Dinesh Victor and Saugata Banerjee attend a panel discussion at Conversations 2026. Pictures by Arijit Ganguly

### CHANDREYEE GHOSE

Calcutta: A minute's silence for the death and devastation following the recent Nepal flash floods kicked off SIP Abacus presents admission-free in Conversations 2026, organised in association with Young Metro, The Telegraph, at ITC Sonar on September 2. The event, powered by J.D. Birla Institute and Vidya Mandir Society, traced Sustainability Reimagined.

For over 200 educators present there, sustainability and disaster management were linked and part of everyday lessons in school. Post Nepal, teachers are busy answering questions related to natural disasters. They are also trying to make students change their habits.



Educators listen to the panel discussion on Sustainability Reimagined

activities, chipped in Loveleen Saigal, principal of Birla High School.

"We have skill studios and innovation labs that help students think of green solutions. Besides, morning assemblies make them aware of climate action and how they can help," she said.

School education is no longer limited to textbook chapters and exhibitions on sustainability. Students are encouraged to learn through experience — take care of the greenery on the school grounds, participate in green rallies, talk about plastic pollution in local markets and be part of the change.

"Sustainability and disaster preparedness are deeply connected. When children understand why disasters happen, how communities become vulnerable and what responsible choices can prevent or reduce the impact, learning becomes meaningful. Our responsibility is to take learning beyond textbooks and connect it with real life," said Dr. Jai Ranjan Ram, principal of Sri Sri Academy.

At the event, her students presented a project showcasing how discarded PET bottles can be repurposed to create a floating base for growing crops and how organic kitchen waste can be converted into compost.

The school's nature club or Fellowship for Focused Sus-

tainable Services helps students change their habits.

Small changes in the classrooms have had a big impact elsewhere. At St Jude's High School in Madhyamgram, fans and lights are sometimes switched off for five minutes to teach conservation. "We also carry out waste management drives and rainwater harvesting, among other things," said principal Aditi Chakrabarty.

At all branches of National English School, students learn by observing the solar panels at the school.

"Sustainability must be experienced, not merely taught. We integrate environmental awareness and disaster preparedness into our curriculum through meaningful, hands-on experiences. Initiatives such as green rallies, sapling plantation drives and classroom projects help students understand their responsibility towards nature and the community," said Mousumi Saha, founder-principal of Vih Road branch.

Ambica Mehra, principal of Delhi Public School, Newtown, also felt the role of educators is to integrate sustainability and disaster preparedness into everyday learning. "The Nepal flash floods opened meaningful conversations on preparedness, resilience and responsible action, helping students connect classroom learning with real-world challenges."

Nepal has shaken many students and teachers alike. "We sensitised students on climate vulnerability and community preparedness. Our students are busy spreading awareness, planting trees, reducing waste or plastic, saving water and energy and are also using eco-friendly transportation to build a sustainable society," said Siddhartha Dey, principal of July Day School, Calcutta.



Tuhin Ghosh, director of the School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University, judges the model by Griffiths International School. Pictures by Arijit Ganguly

## Green ideas to greener action

**THE LAB:** From a gas-leak detector that can shut off a stove to paper pots, students find green solutions at Conversations 2026

### ADRIJA GHOSH

Calcutta: For Prasheetha Bhattacharyya, exhibiting her project for Green Sprint was a milestone. With exams underway, she and her team raced against time to prepare Purovo, their low-cost air-filtering prototype, for the final presentation.

They squeezed in work whenever they could, balancing revision with last-minute tweaks to their model.



Dr Jai Ranjan Ram delivers his masterclass at the event

Their prototype combines jute mesh, activated charcoal, UV disinfection and an exhaust fan. They used a density sensor and microcontroller to detect polluted air. Although Purovo did not make the podium, it was still an honour for the Class X student of St John's Diocesan Girls' Higher Secondary School. "Clean air should be accessible to everyone," said Prasheetha.

From detecting gas leaks to recycling paper into plant pots, students at SIP Abacus presents admission-free in Conversations 2026 brought sustainability out of the classroom and into the realm of practical solutions on September 2. The fourth edition of the event, organised in association with Young Metro, The Telegraph, and powered by J.D. Birla Institute and Vidya Mandir Society, was themed Sustainability Reimagined. Green Sprint invited students of Classes VIII to XII to identify environmental problems and devise solutions.

From 50 participating schools, 20 were shortlisted to present their action plans.

Three winners were selected for problem identification and commitment to action. The judge was Tuhin Ghosh, director of the School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University. "The new generation is extremely tech-savvy, choosing critical social and environmental issues to tackle, yet their approach is very optimistic and solution-based," he said.

Lakshmipta Singhania Academy emerged as the winner by developing a system that can detect a gas leak. "We did not expect to win the first prize, so it was a big moment for us," said Riddhika Bhattacharya, Class VIII, Calcutta Public School, Kalkiapur's project was an EcoBot designed to reduce carbon footprint. They came second.

"Seeing our project win boosted our confidence. It can be used to stem global warming and pollution," said Shalinee Maitra, Class IX, Magnus Global School came third on turning discarded school paper into biodegradable pots for plantation drives. The idea emerged after students noticed unused plastic pots at their school nursery. "It is a low-cost, scalable concept with a very simple yet effective idea behind it," said Isabella Mukherjee of Class IX.

Masterclasses followed, covering careers, world of radio and the impact of social media on mental well-being. Speakers included Avigyan Mitra, in-charge, School of Interior Design, J.D. Birla Institute and his colleague, Sweeta Rani Rai, assistant professor, School of Food Science and Nutrition Management, senior consultant psychiatrist Dr Jai Ranjan Ram and others. Dr Ram urged students to look beyond the filtered perfection of social media. "Life is like a Indian thali," he said, with its mix of nourishing food, desserts and bitter, adding that conversations remain central to human development.

### THE 17 GOALS NEED A REALITY CHECK

**THE INSIGHT:** Green actions need to move beyond classrooms and textbooks to become part of everyday choices. The focus is now on educators and students to reimagine how sustainable habits can shape schools, communities and the future



Every subject in school should be linked to sustainability. Teachers teach, but few practise the sustainable goals in personal life. Students need to be more aware of what is going wrong and right, and how climate action can change the situation. Cleanliness is a huge issue in our country. Nobody litters in the western nations. Check pollution and we will inch towards sustainability

**Sujoy Biswas**  
principal  
Ram Mohan Mission High School



In the classroom of Delhi Public School (DPS), Megacity, sustainability and disaster preparedness are integrated across subjects rather than taught as isolated topics. A science lesson is used to explore climate change, water conservation and ecosystems; through mathematics, we analyse rainfall, resource consumption or disaster data; geography lessons are used for students to understand natural hazards and vulnerability; languages can encourage reflection and communication around environmental issues. Our children are taught to understand risks, identify hazards and think critically

**Indrani Sanyal**  
academic adviser  
DPS, Megacity



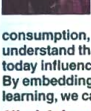
Sustainability goals need to move from being high-level global ambitions to something students can see, experience and influence in their everyday lives. Instead of talking only about climate change or net-zero targets, let students tackle practical issues in their own school and community. Can we reduce the waste from our lunchboxes? Can we save water in our washrooms? Can we make our classroom use less electricity? Give students ownership of small, achievable challenges where they can see results

**Janet Gaspar Chowdhury**  
president  
The St Augustine Education Society



At Birla Bharati, sustainability is a culture we live, not just a chapter we teach. From our 'Thought of the Day' and class lessons to projects, boards and even our upcycled fashion show, everything reflects sustainability

**Madhumita Seal**  
principal  
Birla Bharati



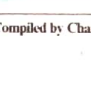
Sustainability Reimagined means moving beyond simply protecting what we have to consciously creating a better future. Education has a vital role in shaping young minds that value responsible consumption, respect for nature and understand that every choice we make today influences the world of tomorrow. By embedding sustainability in everyday learning, we can empower students

**Nirmal Jaiswal**  
director  
Bishop George Mission School



Sustainable choices are the need of the hour. This event is a great effort to educate the educators. We are here to listen to various viewpoints and go back and teach our students. We need to reimagine and upgrade our knowledge

**Krishnendu Bagchi**  
principal  
St Augustine's Day School for Boys



**Shweta Ray**  
principal  
St Augustine's Day School, Barrackpore



There are 17 sustainable development goals. Schools have started teaching these goals, but do they practise sustainability? The need is to change habits, conserve resources and practise the goals in our personal lives. If we remove billboards from cities, stop laying wires haphazardly and improve the drainage system and maintain pavements, any city will be automatically beautiful. This is a sustainable growth plan. Consumption should be with a purpose

**Joseph Emmanuel**  
chief executive and secretary  
Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations



The challenge facing the world is that we are consuming much more than the generation of resources. The cost of reducing consumption is high. There should be a mix of awareness and policies or law to create changes in habits. The cost factor also has to be taken into account. It is a slow process, but we need to know how to balance everything

**Dinesh Victor**  
founder and managing director  
SIP Abacus



Our generation is trying to make amends for the damage we have caused to nature. Now that we are at the brink of collapse, we have understood the consequences and are urging the younger generation to be careful and make sustainable choices. The youth should work in the right direction to make the world that they have inherited more livable — one that would benefit the coming generations

**Maj Gen V.N. Chaturvedi (retd)**  
secretary-general  
Vidya Mandir Society



We need to reimagine the whole process. We have to move away from goals and make systemic changes. Our mindset needs to change as well. Most importantly, sustainable choices should also be competitive choices, backed by the entire system and policies

**Saugata Banerjee**  
director  
J.D. Birla Institute



Our SIP Abacus alumni are increasing. They are doing very well around the world. It is a sustainable life skill that we have taught them and they, in turn, are spreading awareness

**Shubhrajit Mullick**  
regional head (east and northeast India)  
SIP Abacus



We need to reimagine the way we implement sustainability. Whatever we have been doing since 2015, when the UN first mooted the Sustainable Development Goals, has not been enough — it has been more flop than hit. We need to make sustainability relevant to our everyday lives, not keep it confined to theory, textbooks or projects by children. It requires a mindset change, where sustainability becomes part of everything we do

**Sharmila Bose**  
former principal and director  
Sushila Birla Girls' School



Innovation is part of our ecosystem right from Class VII. Students are encouraged all the time to think of sustainable ideas and solutions. They are conscious individuals by the time they leave school

**Meena Kak**  
director  
Lakshmipta Singhania Academy

### BEYOND AMAR CHITRA KATHA, THE REAL STORIES BEGIN, SAYS A STORYTELLER

**THE NARRATIVE:** Why does mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik continue to return to the same instinct — curiosity? The writer-illustrator speaks about why children should discover stories for themselves, and why he believes parenting cannot be outsourced to screens

### PUSHPA KUMARI SAH

You've worked with mythology for years. What was the first myth or story that genuinely made you curious as a child?

I read a book on the *Bhagavat Puran* by Padma Subrahmanyam, available at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. I realised that what *Amar Chitra Katha* had told me was only a short, abbreviated version. I felt cheated and thought I should find out more about the things people were hiding from me.

If mythology had not become your field, what would you have written about or chosen to do?

I find myself drawn towards botany. I enjoy plants. We all talk about state plants and remember them during exams, but I have travelled across India and, whenever I step out of airports and railway stations, I never see the state plant. Nowadays, I see all

these temples being built, and none of them have trees.

Which form of storytelling feels most natural to you? Never use audio/visuals. Just tell the story to a child and tell them to illustrate it.

Children's attention spans are said to have shortened because of reels and videos. How can we improve them?

The reels have shortened the time? No, that's not true. Parents have shortened the time they want to spend with children. Food is cooked by the maid and the child is taken care of by the teacher. Parenting has been outsourced. When you outsource parenting, we start blaming Instagram.

How do you define mythology and history when the two are being blurred?

We live in a world where people are confused about what is a man and a woman.



Devdutt Pattanaik delivers his keynote address at SIP Abacus presents admission-free in Conversations 2026, organised in association with Young Metro, The Telegraph, at ITC Sonar. Picture by Arijit Ganguly

Many postmodern ideas are spreading, which means subjects will also lose the same boundaries. You can have mythology become history and history become mythology, just as people can move from man to woman and woman to man.

These boundaries are dis-

solving, and I think it shows an absence of clarity. We are not celebrating clarity. Even professors keep using words like "problematic" and "maybe" instead of giving a clear answer that enables decision-making. That has resulted in a world where nobody is taking a clear stand.

For example, horses are not there in Harappa. But somebody can write a book where Shiv rides horses and enters the Harappan civilisation, and nobody calls it out — not one professor, teacher or student.

Suddenly, you realise the absence of critical thinking.

What can mythology teach teenagers making career choices in a world shaped by influencers, algorithms and artificial intelligence?

Mythology can't teach anything because mythology doesn't teach. People have to teach themselves. When children have a crisis — and all

of them will — they will come back to the basic texts and figure it out themselves. We can't teach children anything. They have to figure it out themselves.

Young readers increasingly encounter mythology through films, memes, comics and social media. Is this a new way of telling old stories or a risk to their meanings?

You can write bad books too. I know many writers who write terrible books on mythology. So, it's not about the medium; it is about how we explain the concepts.

Children like entertainment, so mythology has become entertainment. Children are not curious. If they are not curious, nobody is going to give them knowledge.

What is your advice on sustainability?

Infinity is limited, but curiosity is unlimited.