

Students learn to use RTI for green concerns

Contributed by allan
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Gurgaon, Nov 19 - From demanding to know the status of and expenses incurred in river-cleaning projects to the level of pollutants being let out into the environment by industries, school students from across the country learnt how to use the Right to Information (RTI) Act to address environmental concerns at a conference here.

Organised by a non-profit group, Programme for Environmental Awareness in Schools (PEAS), the three-day long conference, which concluded Sunday, hosted more than 500 students at the Tagore International School.

Sanaya Nariman, an educationalist and chairperson of the Delhi chapter of PEAS, said: 'To be able to take any action, we first need to know what is happening in our cities and its environment and the RTI Act can empower school students to do so.'

'We are encouraging students to file applications under the RTI Act to know the status of and expenses incurred on government projects to clean up various rivers and lakes. The students can also ask for the levels of pollution being let out into the air, lakes or land by industries,' Nariman, daughter-in-law of Fali S. Nariman, former Additional Solicitor General and senior advocate, told IANS.

The seventh national conference by PEAS was presided over by Director General of Police Kiran Bedi and the chairman of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Krishna Kumar.

Diptesh Pawa, a Class 9 student from St. Mary's School in Mumbai, said: 'Everyone must be aware of green issues facing our planet. After all every living organism needs oxygen to live.'

Pawa, who has been involved with PEAS for the last two years, has already planted six trees to do his bit in conserving the environment, and now plans to use the RTI Act to make an impact.

Sanaeya Daruvala, a Class 10 student from Mumbai's Activity High School, said she was concerned about the climate change. 'I have made several power-point presentations in my school to make my fellow students aware of the fact that we are responsible for global warming, and how we can live more responsibly.'

PEAS founder president Ken Gnanakan said contrary to popular notion that schoolchildren are too young to understand green issues, the kids show more concern.

'Thanks to the RTI Act, students too can make a lot of difference, besides spreading awareness in their homes, neighbourhood and schools,' he said.

The RTI Act of 2005 is a watershed legislative measure for Indian democracy. A crucial law for the promotion of transparency and accountability from the government, it allows citizens to demand information (in the form of records, documents, samples and orders) from the government regarding any government department or office. The provision of a penalty clause also reduces the chances of denial of granting information or giving incomplete information on the part of government officials.

The conference included an eco-fashion show to help students learn how they can use waste items at home and eco-friendly fabric such as jute to make useful products.