Loyola College student wins Speak for India title, NIT Trichy student is runner-up in final debate over social media influencers

YOUTH SHOW FIRE POWER IN WAR OF WORDS

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

In chaste Tamil, R Vishwa, a first year MBA student of Loyola College, lashed out at some social media influencers for peddling stories, promoting products and taking people for a ride. In a few minutes, he was praising them for being the "voice of the voiceless".

It prompted school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, who later gave away the prizes, to joke about turncoat politicians. Vishwa was displaying his articulation skills while arguing from either side of a debating point to win the Speak for India – Tamil Nadu title this year. His opponent, Harshdaa S Nair, a final year chemical engineering student of NIT Trichy who chose to speak in English, gave a tough fight to Viswa to come runner-up.

While the winner got a cash prize of ₹2.5 lakh, the second place got ₹1.5 lakh. Each of the other finalists - Yasar Arafhat S, Sinega B N, Mahitha R, Godwin S Rathinam, Tejaswini S, and M Santoshkumar - won ₹35,000. On Monday afternoon, the war of words – laden with originality and perspective – began. The intense debate left the jury – advocate and debater Sanjay Pinto, WCC principal Lilan Jasper and actor-stand-up comedian Badava Gopi – with a tough job. Actors

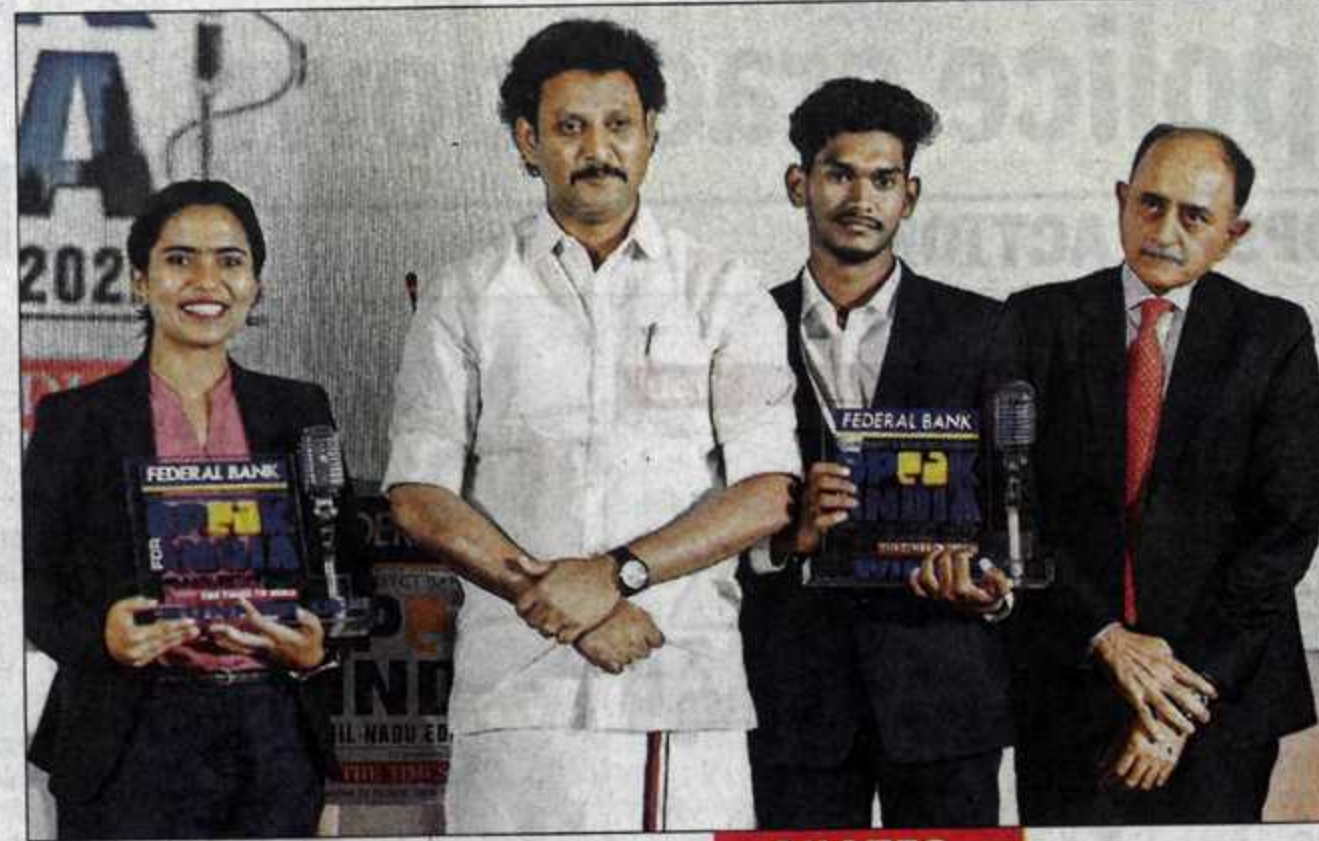Kasthuri Shankar and Mahendran wished the participants.

Kasthuri almost joined the debate, analysing the pros and cons of ChatGPT, one of the topics of the day. "Today, the world-wide web has made knowledge free; the flip side is that misinformation too is free," she said.

The finalists were divided into two groups and each one was given a topic. While two students from one group had to speak for the subject and the other two against it. The topic for the first group, comprising Harshidaa and Vishwa, was 'Are migrant workers an exploited lot everywhere?' For the second, it was, 'Should educational institutions ban AI backed software like ChatGPT?'

Vishwa, who is originally from Madambur in Ramanathapuram district, said that it was his mother tongue Tamil that helped him win the event. "I have always wanted to become a public orator and I started public speaking when I was in Class VI," he said. Harshidaa said she has been an orator since her school days. M V S Murthy, chief marketing officer of Federal Bank said the group wants to take the debate to more regions. "It is a great opportunity for youngsters to exchange thoughts, bring in perspective and debate. We want to make it sustainable and grow the event across geographies, regional languages," he said.

A LITTLE TRIVIA

Speak for India is the world's largest debating competition. Organised by Federal Bank Hormis Memorial Foundation in association with The Times of India to encourage young and enthusiastic minds across the state to raise their voice on pertinent issues and become the change makers of society. This is the third season to find the most vibrant, confident, and persuasive debaters from different districts and colleges in Tamil Nadu.

ON THE DAIS: (Above, from left) Harshidaa S Nair, runner-up, Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, Minister for School Education, Tamil Nadu, R Vishwa, winner of the Speak for India Tamil Nadu Edition 2023, Shyam Srinivasan, MD/CEO, Federal Bank; (below) actors Kasthuri Shankar and Mahendran

Pics: R Ramesh Shankar

FEDERAL BANK
YOUR PERFECT BANKING PARTNER
Speak for INDIA
TAMIL NADU EDITION 2023
THE TIMES OF INDIA

RUNNER-UP

WINNER

QUOTES

Shyam Srinivasan, MD/CEO, FEDERAL BANK

It has been an exciting programme. This is the third year in Tamil Nadu. Often when you think in your mother tongue and speak in English you struggle, but if you think and speak in the mother tongue chances of expressing are better 99

Kasthuri Shankar, ACTOR

Times of India and Federal Bank should be appreciated for providing an opportunity for students to debate in English and Tamil. English and other languages are means of communication, Tamil is an emotion 99

Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi,
MINISTER FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION, TAMIL NADU

Federal Bank and The Times of India have provided an excellent platform for acknowledging the talent among youngsters. The students have been shortlisted from among 850 odd colleges 99

'Raise voice when freedom is snatched'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

"Epporul yaaryaarvaaik ketpinum apporul, meypporul kaanpa tharivu (The mark of wisdom is to discern the truth from whatever source it is heard)." That was the Thirukkural verse that came to the mind of school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi as he listened to the final debate between R Vishwa and Harshidaa S Nair on the topic, 'Are social media Influencers reliable?'

On a lighter note, he compared the role reversal during the finals to the switching of parties by politicians. "When I saw the twist, I was reminded of politicians who switch loyalty," he said, leaving the audience in splits. Referring to the recent trend of muzzling freedom of expression, he said: "Here we are at Speak for India, but the situation is such that we have to wonder if we can speak in India. When freedom of speech is snatched, we should voice out against it," he said.

Appreciating the talent of the youngsters, the minister noted that the state government is running a programme called TN Talk, modelled on Ted talk. "We are planning to bring 25 speakers every year to address students. The winners of Speak for India will be provided with a chance to interact with the government school students and explain how they prepared for the debate," he said.

He appreciated Federal Bank and The Times of India for providing the platform for youngsters to display their talent. "While returning after delivering a speech at a public meeting, I secretly yearn for my driver to say that my speech was good. We all need acknowledgement," he said. Shortlisting participants from among 850-odd colleges is no mean task, the minister said, congratulating the organisers and judges.

OTHER SEMI-FINALIST

Yasar Arafhat

Tejaswini S

Sinega B N

Godwin S

M Santhosh Kumar

Mahitha R