

10th Sat Paul Mittal

National Inter-University Debate Competition 2026

“The Present Education System is Conducive to Developing Sound Mental Health among Youth”

12-13 March 2026 | New Delhi

Brief Report

The Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IAPPD) organized the 10th Sat Paul Mittal National Inter-University Debate Competition 2026 on 12–13 March 2026 at the IAPPD Auditorium, New Delhi. The prestigious event brought together university students from across the country to engage in meaningful discussions on the important issue of mental health among youth.

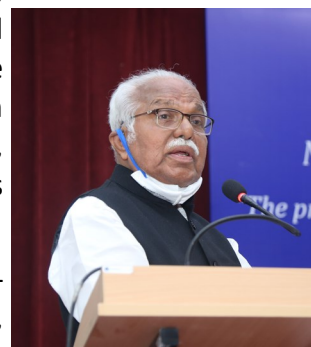
This year’s debate centered on the theme, “The Present Education System is Conducive to Developing Sound Mental Health among Youth” (for/against), encouraging participants to examine and deliberate on the challenges and pressures faced by students in the current education environment. A total of 21 universities participated, each represented by two students—one speaking for the motion and one against—along with one accompanying faculty member.

The Inaugural Session

The Inaugural Session featured Hon’ble Justice Iqbal Ahmad Ansari, Chief Justice, Patna High Court, as the Chief Guest. The session was presided over by Prof. P. J. Kurien, former Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, and Chairman of IAPPD. Mr. Avinash Rai Khanna, former Member of Parliament and Vice Chairman of the IAPPD Standing Committee, also graced the occasion with his esteemed presence. The debate was convened by Prof. Sudesh Nangia. Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, efficiently anchored the event and played a key role in successfully organizing the debate.

Prof. P. J. Kurien extended a warm welcome to all participating students, expressing his appreciation for their enthusiasm and commitment to thoughtful dialogue. He encouraged them to approach the debate with an open and positive mindset, free from stress or apprehension, and to view the platform as an opportunity for learning and growth. He emphasized that meaningful discussions, grounded in respect and understanding, would not only enrich their perspectives but also contribute valuable insights to the larger discourse.

Hon’ble Justice Iqbal Ahmad Ansari commenced his address by posing a thought-provoking question on whether anyone had ever seen Gods in conflict, emphasizing that while individuals may claim the supremacy of their respective faiths, the creators themselves do not clash, and therefore human discord is unjustified. He highlighted that all religions fundamentally promote unity, citing examples from the Quran, Hindu philosophy, and Christianity to underline the idea of one universal divine presence and shared humanity. He observed that conflicts arise not from faiths but from human actions. Stressing the values of Indian democracy, he noted that it is founded on equality, justice, and the principle of



“agreement to disagree,” where mutual respect must prevail despite differing opinions. He further advised the students that true harmony goes beyond legal provisions and depends on trust, integrity. Urging the youth to act with sincerity and responsibility, he concluded by invoking the ideals of national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, calling upon all to uphold unity, respect diversity, and strengthen the nation’s social fabric.

Mr. Avinash Rai Khanna also welcomed the students and commended their participation in the debate. He urged them to engage in the deliberations with confidence, clarity, and a spirit of mutual respect, without allowing pressure to hinder their expression. Highlighting the importance of constructive exchange of ideas, he expressed hope that the participants would offer thoughtful and practical insights, making the debate both enriching and impactful for all.



The Competitors

Students selected from 20 universities across India participated in the competition, showcasing exceptional debating skills and thoughtful perspectives. A panel of eminent experts served as judges, ensuring a stimulating and intellectually enriching exchange of ideas.

The Panel of Judges

To evaluate the participating students and universities, a panel of judges was constituted under the chairpersonship of Prof. Sudesh Nangia, comprising Prof. Shubhakanta Mohapatra of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Dr. Geeta Narayan (formerly with UNFPA), Prof. Anuradha Banerjee of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and Mr. Shankar Chowdhury (formerly with UNESCO).



The Valedictory Session

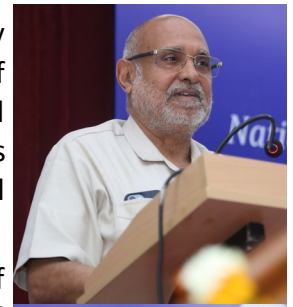
The Valedictory Session, held on 13 March 2026, was graced by Mr. P.D.T. Achary, former Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha as the Chief Guest. Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, a distinguished psychiatrist and leading expert in the field of mental health, also addressed the gathering and shared valuable insights on youth mental well-being.

In his valedictory address, Prof. P. J. Kurien highlighted the growing mental health challenges among youth, noting that the emphasis on academic excellence and competition often comes at the cost of well-being. He stressed that true “perfection” lies not in marks but in clarity, resilience, and confidence, and called for a more balanced and humane education system that nurtures curiosity, creativity, and emotional strength.



Inaugural Session: Participating students with the Dignitaries

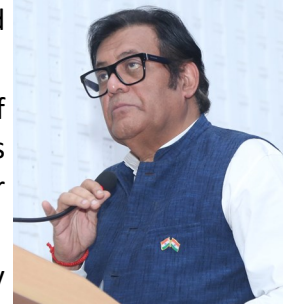
Mr. Avinash Rai Khanna pointed to the various challenges students face, particularly family-related issues and everyday stressors, and underscored the vital role of teachers in providing support and guidance. Drawing from his experience, he shared that simple practices like brief meditation can significantly improve students' focus and well-being, advocating for a more empathetic and nurturing educational environment.



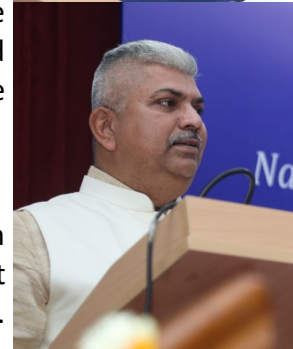
In his concluding remarks, Mr. P. D. T. Achary emphasized the importance of secularism as a cornerstone of India's democracy, ensuring equality, freedom, and unity in a diverse society. He noted that such an environment promotes mental well-being, while its absence can lead to stress and division, and called for collective efforts to uphold these values.



Dr. Jitender Nagpal highlighted the multiple challenges facing youth today, including mental health issues and substance abuse, stressing the need for context-specific solutions rooted in India's socio-cultural realities. He advocated for greater awareness, empathy, and collaborative efforts by families, institutions, and policymakers to create a supportive environment for young minds.



Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, former Member of Parliament and an active member of the IAPPD Standing Committee, also addressed the participating students, sharing his insightful perspectives on the mental health challenges faced by the younger generation.



Prof. Sudesh Nangia, Convener of the debate and the guiding force behind every aspect of organizing this prestigious event since its inception, announced the winners of the competition. She expressed her hope that the rich deliberations and insights shared by the participants would prove valuable in shaping their future academic and professional pursuits.



The Winners

After nearly one and a half days of intense and engaging deliberations, during which participants presented insightful and well-articulated arguments both for and against the motion, the University of Jammu, emerged as the winner, represented by Ms. Khushi Jaswal and Ms. Shilpa Devi, while Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, secured the runner-up position with Mr. Robin Thakur and Ms. Radhika Sharma. The first prize in individual category was awarded to Mr. Vineet Detha from the University of Delhi (Hansraj College), followed by the second prize to Mr. Anirudh Arora from Guru Nanak Dev University, Punjab, and the third prize to Mr. Hitesh Dubey from Barkatullah University, Bhopal. Consolation prizes were awarded to Mr. Arnav Tripathi from Kumaun University, Uttarakhand, and Ms. Namrata Sarma from North Eastern Hills University (NEHU), Meghalaya. The winning universities and individual participants were presented with cash prizes, certificates, and shields in recognition of their achievement.

All other students were awarded participation certificates and mementos, while the accompanying faculty members were presented with plaques.

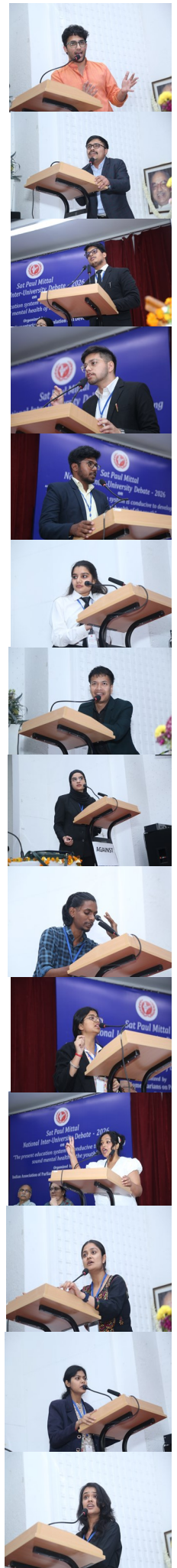


Prize distribution ceremony

The following key points emerged from the debate competition:

FOR the Motion

1. Institutionalization of Mental Health Support: The education system today formally recognizes mental health as part of student development. Many universities have counselling cells, peer-support groups, and tie-ups with mental health professionals. This institutional backing normalizes help-seeking behaviour—something that was largely absent a decade ago. Students are no longer expected to “deal with it alone,” which directly supports emotional stability.
2. Shift from Rote Learning to Holistic Development: Policies like India’s NEP 2020 emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and multidisciplinary learning. This reduces cognitive monotony and allows students to explore their interests, which is strongly linked to better mental satisfaction and lower academic burnout.
3. Integration of Well-being Practices: Yoga, mindfulness sessions, meditation breaks, and wellness weeks are increasingly integrated into campus life. These are not just symbolic; they equip students with tools to manage stress, regulate emotions, and build resilience—skills essential for long-term mental health.
4. Flexibility and Second Chances: Modern systems provide multiple entry-exit options, semester systems, credit transfers, and gap year acceptance. This flexibility reduces the “one exam decides your life” pressure and helps students recover from setbacks without long-term psychological damage.
5. Increased Awareness and Reduced Stigma: Campaigns, student-led initiatives, and social media discourse have made mental health a mainstream topic. Students today are more likely to recognize symptoms of anxiety or depression and seek help early, preventing escalation.
6. Safe and Inclusive Campus Ecosystems: Many institutions are adopting anti-ragging policies, gender sensitization programs, and inclusion policies for LGBTQ+ students and marginalized groups. A safer, more inclusive environment reduces identity-based stress and promotes psychological well-being.
7. Career Preparedness Reduces Anxiety: Internships, placements, skill labs, and entrepreneurship cells reduce uncertainty about the future—a major source of stress among youth. When students feel prepared for life beyond academics, their mental health improves.
8. Peer Networks and Emotional Support Systems: University life provides exposure to diverse peer groups. These networks act as informal emotional support systems, helping students cope with stress through shared experiences, friendships, and collaboration.
9. Digital Access to Resources: Online platforms, mental health apps, recorded lectures, and academic flexibility allow students to learn at their own pace and access help anytime. This reduces pressure and gives students greater control over their schedules.
10. Recognition of Non-Academic Achievements: Today’s system values sports, arts, leadership, and volunteering. This reduces the singular focus on academics and allows students to derive self-worth from multiple domains, improving self-esteem.



AGAINST the Motion

1. Systemic Academic Pressure Remains Unchanged: Despite reforms, the system is still highly competitive. Entrance exams, grading systems, and cut-offs create a constant pressure environment. For many students, academic performance is directly tied to self-worth, leading to anxiety and burnout.
2. Marks-Centric Culture Undermines Self-Esteem: Even with holistic policies on paper, the reality remains marks-driven. Students are judged by scores, ranks, and placements. This fosters unhealthy comparison, perfectionism, and fear of failure—key contributors to poor mental health.
3. Inadequate Mental Health Infrastructure: While elite institutions may offer support, a vast number of colleges—especially in rural and semi-urban India—lack trained counsellors, awareness programs, or confidential support systems. The benefits are not evenly distributed.
4. Tokenism in Mental Health Initiatives: Many institutions conduct “one-day workshops” or awareness drives without sustained support. Mental health becomes a checkbox activity rather than a deeply integrated system, limiting real impact.
5. Career and Parental Pressure: Students face dual pressure—from the system and from societal expectations. Fields like engineering, medicine, and government jobs are often imposed, leading to lack of interest, frustration, and long-term psychological distress.
6. Bullying, Ragging, and Toxic Competition: Despite regulations, ragging and peer bullying persist in subtle forms—academic sabotage, social exclusion, and online harassment. These experiences can have lasting mental health consequences.
7. Digital Burnout and Isolation: Online education and excessive screen time have reduced face-to-face interaction, leading to loneliness, sleep disturbances, and attention issues. The flexibility of digital learning sometimes turns into a lack of structure, increasing anxiety.
8. Neglect of Emotional and Life Skills: The system still prioritizes cognitive achievement over emotional intelligence. Students are rarely taught coping strategies, conflict resolution, or stress management in a structured way.
9. Inequality and Access Gaps: Students from economically weaker sections face additional stress due to lack of resources, digital divide, and language barriers. This creates a mental health gap where the most vulnerable students receive the least support.
10. Uncertain Future and Employment Anxiety: Even with degrees, job insecurity remains high. The mismatch between education and employability creates chronic anxiety about the future, undermining mental well-being.
11. Lack of Individual Attention: Large class sizes and standardized teaching methods ignore individual learning needs. Students who struggle academically often feel neglected, leading to low confidence and disengagement.
12. Over-Scheduling and Burnout Culture: Students are expected to excel in academics, internships, extracurriculars, and social life simultaneously. This “always productive” culture leaves little room for rest, increasing stress levels.



The debate brought forth strong and contrasting perspectives. The “for” side argued that the education system is gradually evolving and developing structures that support mental health, although these efforts remain imperfect. In contrast, the “against” side contended that the system remains inherently stressful, and that incremental reforms are insufficient to counter its deeply competitive and unequal nature.

Through this initiative, IAPPD continues to promote critical thinking, leadership, and policy-oriented dialogue among young people, empowering them to engage with pressing national and global issues with informed and responsible perspectives.

