

Talking the talk

- Abheeshu Dhungana, Kathmandu | Feb 9, 2013-

Should Nepal prioritise foreign investment and not labour export?

Such a question may repeatedly make rounds in the nation's policy-making circles, or result in heated discussions among a group of professors. But on February 7, it was young high-school students who gave their take on the topic at the Kathmandu Debates 2013 finale held at the British College in Thapathali.

Organised by Sano Sansar Initiative, a youth-based NGO that works for "the environment and sustainable lifestyles", the competition began officially on January 27 with a preliminary round held at the Laboratory School, Kirtipur, where, of the various contenders, representatives from Chelsea Academy, Bridgewater College, Nasa College and St Xavier's College emerged victorious. In the next round, these four competed against each other, with St Xavier's and Nasa colleges reaching the finals. It was the students from St Xavier's who were ultimately able to win the trophy.

Shreya Joshi brought the debate alive with recollection of the brutality faced by Nepali labour migrants in Iraq a few years ago. Joshi, of St Xavier's College, was speaking for the motion. To further her stance on the importance of foreign investment, she cited the example of Ncell—a mobile operator with foreign investments—which has provided a considerable boost to the telecommunications sector ever since its entry in Nepal in 2004 as Mero Mobile. "Foreign investments also help improve the efficiency of different companies, enabling them to make use of the latest technologies," she added. Joshi was keen to point out that foreign investors have a better record of prioritising human rights, unlike employment abroad which has come with its share of human rights violations.

Up next was Sanju Baral of Nasa College, speaking against the motion. She began by offering details published by the Nepal Rastra Bank—remittance sent by migrant labourers constitutes 23 percent of the country's total GDP at the moment. Baral also brought to light the enormous opportunity for corruption prospects of foreign investment presents to bureaucrats.

Other speakers, representing both sides, followed the lead of their predecessors and presented a series of strong, convincing arguments to counter the stances made by their opponents. The entire atmosphere was charged with a festive dynamism and the audience, comprised largely of students, listened in rapture. The debaters were perhaps more excited about speaking in front of the Chief Guest Keith West from the US Embassy and special guests, including superstar Rajesh Hamal, visual artist Milan Rai and Father Augustine Thomas, principal of St Xavier's College.

According to the organisers, the debate competition, held for the first time in 2013, is intended to become an annual event where students are given a platform to explore their skills in debate, elocution and articulation. With a robust team comprised largely of youth, Sano Sansar is geared towards fostering leadership qualities in them and their debate competition is certainly a step in that direction. And even though the concept of 'debating', especially in the context of a competition, means that not everyone is victorious, all that participated will have certainly earned something valuable through the event.

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