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Parikrma Science Festival: Top scientists to meet slum kids

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The Parikrma Science Festival will take place at JNCASR in Jakkur, on Jan 21, 22 and 23.



📷 A child works on his project to be displayed at the Parikrma Science Festival in Bengaluru on Monday (Photo: DC)

Bengaluru: When Shukla Bose, founder, Parikrma Humanity Foundation, approached Professor C.N.R Rao, one of the country's most eminent scientists, to interact with children at the Parikrma Festival of Science, he said, "If I cannot bring in more scientists and researchers from future generations, then what's the point?"

Professor Rao, former IISc director Professor Balram, Professor J. Srinivasan, Chairman of the Divecha Centre for Climate Change, IISc and Professor Umesh Waghmare, winner of the Infosys Prize 2015, are among the lineup of celebrated scientists who will interact with kids at the three-day Parikrma Science Festival.

Students can conduct experiments at Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, learn how to generate biogas and even take a ride in a solar-powered autorickshaw. A mock UN has also been organised for Day 3, on the topic Climate Change Recession.

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The Parikrma Humanity Foundation was founded in 2003 and now runs four learning centers across the city, which cater to about 1700 children from 69 slums and four orphanages. The three-day Festival of Science, which began in 2015, in collaboration with Synopsis, with 20 participating schools has doubled in size this year, with 40 schools and over 200 children participating. The Jawaharlal Nehru Centre and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Energy Development have thrown open their doors to the children as well, giving them access to their labs and facilities. "Kids in government and mid-range mainstream schools work in such cramped spaces. We want to take learning out of classrooms," said Bose.

The theme this year is Energy and a couple of students from Parikrma built a bio-gas unit there earlier this month. The children collected materials to prepare the gas, from cowdung and food waste from the Parikrma Foundation to generate it. "Schools have a very conventional approach to learning," said Bose. "Who is to say, however, that a child won't have a better grasp of a scientific concept by interacting with a leading scientist, rather than staring at a blackboard in a classroom?"

The participating students, who come from some of the most expensive schools in the city as well as from a number of government-run institutions, will be asked, at the start of the festival, to swap their school uniforms for a white lab coat. "One experiment they will do is to check the energy consumption in their own homes. There will be a disparity, of course, between how poorer households and the wealthier families consume energy. That's what we're driving at, though. We want kids to ask questions like, 'Do we really need that dishwasher?'"

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