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Children come up with bombs that bloom

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Calcutta: They are green crackers in the truest sense. These bombs don't burst; they germinate.

In the run-up to Diwali, students at a school gifted "seed bombs" to their peers, teachers, and other staff members.

The balls of soil containing seeds would be planted on the ground to germinate, a teacher said.

Around 250 Class V students of The Newtown School made the seed bombs and undertook a drive on November 5 — three days before Diwali — to distribute the seeds in the school.

The campaign stood out all the more because this Diwali was the loudest in years.

Rampant bursting of crackers turned the air foul. Noise pollution scared the living daylights out of pets across the city. Elderly and ailing Calcuttans had a torrid time.

The effect lingered well beyond Diwali.

At the school, children put the seeds inside a ball of soil ready to be planted.

The initiative started with a discussion with the students, asking them what they understood by a green Diwali.

"One child spoke up and said a green Diwali meant lots of plants. The teacher had an idea of what she wanted to do but wanted children to come up with ideas. Every year during Diwali we brainstorm as to what we can do that would make a difference," said principal Satabdi Bhattacharjee.

Not all children were happy with the concept of a bomb that would not burst, said a teacher.

"But that is what it is about: 'we don't want the bombs to burst, we want them to germinate," the teacher explained to her class.

Air pollution is a real threat, and several schools have been talking to children about the harmful effects that can lead to respiratory problems.

The state government restricted cracker bursting between 8pm and 10pm on Diwali, but it was violated with impunity.

"We tried to create awareness and educate our children that the spirit of Diwali is not only in bursting firecrackers but also in sharing and being sensitive to others," said Bhattacharjee.

Addressing children is easier than talking to senior students. "By the time children are in Classes VIII, IX and X, many of them have already got into the practice of bursting crackers. But when it comes to children in the primary section, they are easy to mould, and they listen to their teachers," said Bhattacharjee.

Children often try to convince their parents not to burst crackers and impress upon them what they learnt in school.

"Some children are sensitive to the distress that firecrackers cause their grandparents or their pets. It is easy to convince them about why it is important to reduce or not burst firecrackers," said a teacher at the school.



Students of The Newtown School with the 'seed bombs' they manufactured

