

BON JOUR, CHANDERNAGAR!

French Consul General to Kolkata Damien Syed and colleague Fabrice Plancon explore the old Bengal town's French connect

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Suraj Ali, Seikh Sohail Ali, Anik Harijan, Rishi Thakur and their other classmates gape in wonder as they hear a Frenchman speak Bengali. "Nomoshkar, apnara kemon achen? Sundor shohor Chandernagar. Apnader sathe alap kore bhalo laglo," French Consul General to Kolkata, Damien Syed says slowly but ardently to the Class IV students at the French Section of Kanailal Vidyamandir in Chandernagar. "Ami Bangla shikhte chai. Ami roj Bangla bolar cheshta kori. Raate Bangla pori. Ami chai apnara Forashi shikhun. Itihas amar khub priyo bishoye. Apnara itihas porun, janun," he adds. After the initial awe and much giggling, the schoolchildren too start interacting with the Consul General and his colleague, Fabrice Plancon, director, Alliance Francaise du Bengale.

Damien, who has been in Kolkata for a while now, has decided to introduce Chandernagar — the French settlement in Bengal — to Fabrice, who has taken charge of the institute in September. The duo was led by conservation architect Aishwarya Tipnis who is also helping the consulate to fix

the venue for the forthcoming Bonjour India, Chandernagar — a cultural exchange programme between India and France that will be held between January 5 and 12.

THE HERITAGE WALK

Damien and Fabrice decide to explore the French connection of Chandernagar through a heritage walk. Accompanied by the education officer of Chandernagar Municipal Corporation, Kalipada Jana, the team visits both English and French sections of Kanailal Vidyamandir.

"Chandernagar is the only municipal corporation that maintain secondary and high secondary schools and hence we have a post called education officer. And this is only because of our French heritage," explains Kalipada Babu to the French team at the headmaster's office of the French Section.

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Father Orson Wells, the priest of Sacred Heart Church, shows the tinted glass decorations to Damien and (right) the Consul General goes for a cycle ride at The Strand for the CT lensman

(From top) Fabrice waits for his glass of cane juice, as Damien looks on before the duo take a toto ride