

11 organisations win EMPI-Indian Express Innovation Awards



The winners with their trophies at the India Habitat Centre on Monday evening. AMIT MEHRA

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NANDAN Nilekani gave away the fourth EMPI-Indian Express Indian Innovation Awards at the India Habitat Centre on Monday evening. The awards went to 11 organisations in all, with eight of them receiving the gold trophies. The awards, in the words of Programme Co-Convenor and EMPI's Vice President for Strategic Initiatives Pankaj Saran, go beyond the "technical innovation by individuals" and recognise "social, institutional and organisational innovations."

The winners were a mix of government, non-government and private initiatives, all of which had succeeded in taking an established idea and tweaking it to achieve astounding results.

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam and Nagpur Municipal Corporation were the government undertakings that featured among the successes. The Akshayapatra Foundation, INTACH and Pratham India Education Initiative were the NGOs that were awarded the gold trophy. Arvind Eye Care System and Samtel Display Systems, both private players, completed the list of eight gold trophy winners.

Chief Guest Nilekani in his address chose to dwell on the Unique Identification Authority of India

(UIDAI), of whom he is the Chairperson. Nilekani chose to talk of the UIDAI as an innovation at different levels. He began by dispelling some myths. "The most common question I get asked is, 'When is the card coming?' And I say there is no card," he said, adding that the absence of the card was part of the innovative business model that his team had adopted.

"What it does is when you start issuing numbers and not cards, you can then provide a partnership model to other organisations. Because we are not in the card business. What we are doing is that we are giving a unique number and then going to the department that issues passports and say, 'Use this unique number and make sure that there are no duplicate passports,'" he said. The former Infosys CEO, without explicit referring to it, drew parallels between what his company has done to his current job.

"So, in some sense we have gone from one more card issuer to somebody who sits at the back of all these cards being issued and provides this function of de-duplication. We think it is an innovative business model because we do not do all the front-end stuff," he said. He added that the "front-end stuff" will be done by agencies which actually touch the customer.

Hosts Gurnam Saran, President of EMPI and NP Singh, Director of The Express Group, helped Nilekani give away the awards.