

Bangladesh becomes the First Asian Member of the World Debating Council

by Syed Munir Khasru

The 3rd of January, 1991 is a memorable day for the entire student community of Bangladesh. On this day Bangladesh became a full voting member of the World Debating Council (WDC). Bangladesh is the first country from Asia to have earned this distinction.

The WDC is the highest international body on debating, and promotes the art of debating throughout the world. It is also responsible for defining the rules and regulations governing the international debating championship that is held every year. Other voting members of the Council are: Australia, Canada, Greece, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Membership applications of India, Jamaica and Israel have been turned down by the Council.

This honour came to Bangladesh during the participation of the University of Dhaka team in the 11th World Debating Championship in Canada. This is international debating competition is attended by universities and colleges from many countries.

The World Debating Championship was significant to Bangladesh for a number of reasons.

This year's participation qualified Bangladesh to apply for the voting membership of the World Debating Council (WDC).

The XI World Debating Championship, provided a unique opportunity to expose the SAARC Debating Competition to a large audience. This exposure was quite important for the eligibility of Bangladesh

to become a full voting member.

As the first voting member from Asia, Bangladesh would be in a better position to make the World Debating Competition more universal by encouraging the Asian countries, with long tradition of debating, to send teams to the World Championship.

The University of Dhaka team was made up of Syed Munir Khasru of Department of Finance and Sonia Zaman Khan of Department of Law (Debater).

The entire cost of the trip was sponsored by the Asia Foundation, Dhaka. Strong Support was provided to the University team by Jon Summers, Jill Tucker and Nipa Reza of the Asia Foundation.

The meeting of WDC took place on January 3, 1990 at the University of Toronto. Bangladesh was represented by the author. Australia moved the motion in favour of Bangladesh's membership to the WDC and Greece seconded it. The Bangladesh representative answered various questions of other member countries of WDC about how debate is practiced and promoted in Bangladesh. The council members were impressed by the fact that one of the state media in Bangladesh organizes a debate competition every year. The WDC members were appreciative of Bangladesh's initiative in popularizing parliamentary form of debate in the SAARC region. The hosting of the South Asian Intersarsity Debate greatly helped Bangladesh's case in the WDC. The successful participation of University of Dhaka in the

World Debating Championship in 1989 (Princeton University, USA) and in 1990 (Glasgow University, UK) and also in the Australasian Debating Championship in 1989 Australia National University, Canberra also strengthened the case for Bangladesh's membership in the WDC. It was decided by unanimous vote that Bangladesh be admitted to the Council.

Being the only representative from the East, Bangladesh had a constructive role to play in the WDC.

The WDC again met on January 5, 1991. In that



The author (2nd from left) seen with participants at Toronto.

meeting some points were raised about the standard of adjudication, the nature of resolutions as well as on some organizational aspects.

Bangladesh suggested that the resolutions of debate should be more broad-based, philosophical and give scope for reflection of in-depth knowledge of the debaters. This is necessary to enable debaters of diverse background to participate with confidence and reasonable success in such Championships. During the debating rounds in Toronto it was found that the scope of some resolutions were so narrowed down by some teams that the opponent teams found it virtually impossible to debate against such definitions. One example of such resolution was 'This House should kiss the sky'.

Bangladesh opined that the participating teams should be given reasonable freedom to debate in their own style to give such competitions a truly international flavor. Each country has its own style of debating and it is impractical to expect debaters around the world to conform to the particular pattern of the host country. It is quite difficult for the Asian teams to adapt to the Western style of debating, which is quite different from the Asian. Westerners have a more informal and casual style. The view of the Bangladesh delegate was supported by the other members and it was decided to take into consideration such factors in future World Debating Championships.

Some countries suggested that the countries sending

more teams should have a greater proportion of votes rather than the existing system of one country — one vote. Bangladesh, Australia and Greece opposed the notion as it would give some countries unfair influence was very much against democratic norms. The issue remained unresolved and subject to further discussion in next year's World Debating Championship in Dublin, Ireland. This issue once again underscored the need for more Asian countries to participate in the World Debates to maintain the Council's global character.

On the organizational side of a debate the following points should be taken care of:

Emphasis should be given on involving students who are in their initial years of university. This gives them ample time to gather experience on organizational aspects and they have the scope of becoming more skilled organizers in their final years.

For Bangladesh participation in the XI World Debating Championship has been very rewarding as it has led to the country's recognition in the debating world and she now has the opportunity to express her opinions and ideas in the World Forum. Also participation in such an event has been enlightening and self fulfilling for the members of the University of Dhaka team.

Besides the enrichment of debating experience, an equally important factor is the opportunity to interact with so many people of diverse backgrounds. Such cross-cultural exchange of ideas and opinions among students always enhances international co-operation and understanding. The friendships that these championships generate are far more enduring than the events themselves.

The author is the President of Dhaka University Theosophical Society.

Superman comes down to earth with a proposal



AFTER half a century thinking about it, Clark Kent has finally put aside his mild manner, summoned his nerves of steel, and asked Lois Lane for her hand in marriage. Faster than a speeding bullet, she accepted.

DC Comics, which has tracked Superman's exploits since he hit the drawing board in 1938, broke news of the betrothal ahead of the publication of the historic strip on November 1. "End of an era" was the verdict of television news broadcasts.

Lois takes pity on her fellow reporter at the Daily Planet and consents to his bumbling proposal. She remains unaware that the meek Kent is the alter ego of America's original superhero.

But in a move that shocked the faithful, the publishers said that Kent will eventually reveal his fiancée the secret that she should have guessed years ago. After years of barely tolerating her feeble colleague, she has come to realise that Kent is "always there when she needs him", according to the DC Comics announcement. "Being there for someone" is the vogue catchphrase, adopted recently by everyone from President Bush to telephone companies.

The writing team originally envisaged having Lois say no because she still loves the man of steel but then relented because "she may have been rough and mean on Clark Kent over the years but it was always work-related". For

most of the past 50 years, Lois has burned with an unrequited passion for Superman.

Only in one of the films was the passion consummated. The usual brush-off went like this: "I'd like to be in your arms always, Superman, (sigh)!" she told the fighter for truth, justice and the American way, when he rescued her from one scrape a couple of decades ago. "Uh, Sorry Lois, but you know the answer to that," Superman replied. "My life is a constant round of superaction and danger and only a supergirl could keep up with me!"

Kent takes the fateful decision after losing his superpowers in a brush with the dreaded red Kryptonite. Reduced to the level of ordinary

mortal, he opts for married life. At least, it means he no longer needs to hunt for telephone booths in a country which long ago abandoned them. "It's not a gag, not a one-issue trick story," said the publishers. "This time, for the first time since the characters were created, it's for real."

The American appetite for comic-strip titans shows no sign of waning. The Mutant Turtles are doing for 1990 children what Superman did for their grandparents, and CBS News has just launched a new evening serial for adults based on the crime-fighting adventures of a bodystocking, faster-than-sound hero called The Flash.

CHARLES BREMNER

The first thing you notice when you land at Dhaka is that you belong. In the USA, you have all the legal rights, all the recourse for redressing grievances, all the modern amenities your heart could desire, but do you really belong? You have no problem snapping right back into the poverty, filth and squalor of your native country. Your true home is where you belong. Your soul rejoices at the thought of Bangladesh, especially a democratic Bangladesh.

However, your real home is the one you left behind, not necessarily the one you find yourself into. As we were growing up in the 60s and 70s, our elders used to complain about the slipping moral and ethical standards. We must be getting on, because we find ourselves complain about the same thing these days. In our student days, people travelled by rickshaw very late at night without an iota of fear. This will be considered suicidal these days. The first choice of Bangladeshis as a place to emigrate is the USA. In some ways we have attained parity with certain places in the US. In crime-infested areas of New York

HOME, SWEET HOME

Fakhruddin Ahmed

City, for example, at the conclusion of business day, people depart handing it over to the roaming criminals. Some parts of Dhaka remind one of those areas of New York.

Just as one can never really return home, one cannot totally leave it behind either. Even in the USA, sooner or later in the course of a conversation people become curious about your native country. Your Americanism is always prefaced by your home country. Although you may consider yourself wholly American, there are others who will remind you that you are not quite.

Therefore, when one of your compatriot lands in trouble with the law, the whole country is painted in a negative shade. Recently a Bengali doctor in New York has been accused of performing dangerous abortions. As the tabloids screamed, "BUTCHER!", Ben-

gals looked for cover. It is so unfair to judge a community by the misdeed of a single person; unfortunately that is the fate that befalls a minority community.

The Bangladesh community in New York has been wounded by another controversy recently — this one self-

The author is a Rhodes Scholar, a scientist who now lives in Princeton, NJ USA. He recently visited his homeland.

inflicted. Five women complained to a New York Times correspondent that Bangladeshi men abroad maintain the old country mentality, and sometimes this makes for a servant-master relationship between the sexes. The men were furious. Denying any male wrong-doing, they chided the

women for washing their dirty linen in public, accused them of insulting Bangladesh, and asked them to apologise. The women defended their right to speak the "truth".

What is the truth? Have not Bangladeshi men, like men everywhere, exploited their women? Women are expected to get an education, a job, get married, have children, cook and entertain guests and be at the service of her husband. If she failed in any of those duties, especially child-bearing, her life would be turned into veritable hell. Society never even questioned about the possibility of male infertility.

However, there is one aspect in which our women are lucky. We are taught to truly respect our women. Is it not ingrained in us that "our heaven lies at the feet of our mother?" Instead of disputing established facts, our men should have pointed out that in a sea

of promiscuity, we are islands of fidelity and chastity.

There are many qualities we can learn from the western society — hard work, innovation and a desire to be the very best. However, the vices are the easiest to acquire. Looking at the life style of many of our men abroad, it appears as though they are preparing for a career in Bangladesh! They socialize only with Bangladeshis, do not talk to their neighbours, have nothing to do with their religion, instead dream of attaining greatness in Bangladesh politics. They forget that one cannot hold office in a foreign government without renouncing their US passport and nationality first. When the parent's mind are so focussed on Bangladesh, the children have to bring themselves up for a life in the USA, with disastrous consequences.

Even our enterprise seems to be misdirected. It is embarrassing to hear about Bangladeshis caught along with Haitians trying to enter the US illegally. Let me assure future immigrants that is you a get a decent education and are willing to work hard, you can still enter the US legally. Forgery, cheating, corner-cutting, and moral and ethical misdeeds will eventually get you into serious trouble! US laws stipulate that one can be deported long after acquiring citizenship, if one made false statements while acquiring it. Remember the many ex-Nazis who were so deported!

We should justly take pride in our simplicity, poetry and cuisine — all of which the westerners appreciate. For Bangladeshis to succeed, all we need to do is to get back to our basic values, which are very sound. Hard work, a moral code based on religious beliefs and an emphasis on a good education are all we need for a successful life anywhere on earth, and in the hereafter.

"Eersha": An Experiment

Star Correspondent

IN the Provence region of France, a married lady once loved a knight. Her husband, mad with jealousy, had the lover killed. That night, he served his lady the heart of her lover. As soon as she had eaten the dish, he told her, and legend has it that she jumped to

talent, achievement, even wealth, but most at all love. Sharp little flickers of jealousy have tortured any lover; some, like Othello, have been consumed in his flames.

The painter Jamaluddin Hossein loves his student-model (Sara Zaker). She has just returned to announce her

balises his rage, he tries to hurt her. Jamaluddin's speech is succinct and clear, but his gesticulating seems overdone. The rhythmic quality of this play, written in blank verse, is at its best here, when he recalls their trips to the river. But it is in Sara Zaker's intonations that the internal rhymes and the almost-natural cadence of the writing is most apparent. In her speech, the verse floats through to the audience.

The play's experimental tone toys with postmodernity. Written in a mere seven monologues, it pushes the acrobatics of speech to the limit. Iluq's verse is strong, especially the undercurrents of rhyme, without being obvious. The erotic vocabulary is refreshing in a tradition of jaded euphemisms and beating around the bush. Much of the audience was shocked, but that is precisely the power of erotic speech. The danger of sexual imagery is that it sometimes looks like posturing. What flawed the experiment, though, was the bulk and length of the monologues. Towards the end, the speeches seem interminable.

We can thank Nagorik and the playwright for a newness in this year's theatre. Though Iluq, in his brief address to the audience, says he is shunning the eternal politico-social theme of Bengali theatre, he cannot resist a reference to '71; the husband recalls his family's destruction.



Sara Zaker and Jamal Uddin Hussain in Nagorik's "Eersha"

her death from the turrets of their castle.

From the distant shadows of myth to the simple mundanity of today, man and woman's primal emotions remain unchanging. Syed Shamsul Iluq, the new play "Eersha", springs from the same jealousy that tormented the legendary knight from Provence. Jealousy encompasses work, beauty,

marriage to another student (Khaled Khan). All his love is concentrated into jealousy; through the painter, Iluq exposes the desire to destroy. Jealousy brings on its own murderous impulse, but the object of destruction is not only the rival, it is the beloved as well.

By reminding her at their past, the painter not only ver-

TEMPLE FOR THE GODS

IN many parts of the modern world, people with personal problems seek remedy or solace by visiting their psychiatrists — or the nearest bar.

Not so in Hindu India; they talk to their gods.

That's why, more than for their own welfare or gratification, they pamper their deities and enthrone them in temples more opulent and richly furnished than their own homes.

If you see the home of Anubhai Sanghavi, a successful businessman in Ahmedabad, Gujarat State, you will be convinced that Hindu gods will be kind to you only if they are housed in opulence.

At his 10-bedroom house, Sanghavi has no carpets, no comfortable sofas and no fancy fittings.

But the temple room called Pujya Room, of Goddess Lakshmi, who protects the family wealth, costs hundreds of thousands of rupees. Imagination can run riot. After all, it is all in exquisite marble.

Goddess Lakshmi is a three-foot-high idol, made of beautifully carved marble. She is flanked by two elephants and

idols of the monkey god, Hanuman, and the elephant Ganapati. The goddess wears a Rs. 2,000-worth sari. And mind you, this sari is just one of the 15 in the wardrobe to the goddess.

Mr. Sanghavi explains: "The house of the goddess of wealth has got to be better than ours. We are surviving because of the goddess."

People in the West might look for stained glass windows in beautiful churches. Here, the urge is to set up a room for your family where everyone can pray together.

Typical of the new wave is 30-year-old Ms. Sangita Shah, wife of a business executive.

"The tensions of modern living require us to set up a worship room where we can relax, meditate and try to find answers to our problems."

But in doing so, wealth plays an important role, take for instance 50-year-old Gulshan Kumar, a Delhi businessman, who now thinks he has finally arrived. He has built a mini-temple on the top of his house. Some 40 people can congregate at one time and participate in community

prayers. Mr. Kumar has taken great pride in designing every tiny detail of the temple. There are scores of idols or "moorties" — all from Jaipur sculpted by a well-known artist. These line one wall of the temple.

At the other end of the room is a three-foot seated marble figure of Mr. Kumar's mother. He worships his mother in the same way as he would any goddess. There is an elaborately designed silver umbrella hanging from the ceiling.

One can only guess the cost of putting up such an elaborate temple. It could easily mean spending 500,000 rupees (US\$40,000). But Mr. Kumar believes that money should not come into the picture.

"It is my feeling that matters," he told me, "and not the amount of money I put in it. We should not even talk about such things."

Take another couple — Chander Nair and his wife Jayanti. Chander, a businessman, has decorated his room with a southern ambience. The room looks like a typical south Indian temple with a *gopuram* (gate) and *tartar puram* (resting place of the idol).

Expensive teak wood was brought from the south and carpenters were flown in from Cochin to build the temple which took six months to finish. It cost Rs. 25,000.

Psychologist Sudhir Kakkar says that Hindus are so deeply embedded in their ancient rituals and beliefs that, unlike the West, they can seek the answers to their problems by "talking" to the gods.

Some couples want sound-proof worship rooms so that they are not disturbed by noisy children and the servants. On the other hand, marble and granite enjoy great popularity in the building of these temples. And for many families,

the worship room is a meeting point twice a day.

Many Hindu businessmen believe that it is the worship of the gods which gives them the strength to face a crisis in the stock market or in the board rooms of companies.

"(The temple room) is always a source of strength," Chaman Lal Sawhni told me. In fact, he spends much time praying to his deities that his children joke about it. They say: "Daddy is having a telephone conversation with the gods."

Vimalbhai Shah, a rich trader based in Ahmedabad, and his wife Nalini, also spend a large part of the day in the Pujya Room of their residence.

The day for them begins at 6 a. m. by cleaning the floor of their mini-temple on the first story of their well-furnished bungalow located in the city's posh Ellisbridge locality.

Then they painstakingly wipe all the statues and furnishings in the temple, taking care not to mar the beautifully arranged appointments.

The ten-foot marble temple of the Shahs is an exceptional specimen of its kind. The main statue of Lord Sambhavanath and several other smaller ones are made of fine material which consists mainly of copper and nickel with small quantities of gold and silver.

The lions are seated on marble platforms carved exquisitely into the walls, above the platforms hangs a carved umbrella supported by two marble pillars.

Some people might be repelled by such extravagant display of finery. But for those who devote great effort and money to make the temples almost like beautiful works of art, nothing can be more satisfying than getting together and communing with the gods — and being one in the flesh and spirit.

— Dephne's Asia



Young Bangladeshi women participating in a recent cultural show.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

Two years ago I got a divorce after 6 years of very unhappy marriage. The divorce was painful, traumatic and bitter. I have recently recovered from it and am picking up the threads of my life again. Recently my ex-husband has started to send me messages saying that he wants a reconciliation. I am very confused and really don't know what to do. Both the families think it is a good idea and in a way are pressuring me. What do you think? Please advise.

Rehana Malibagh, Dhaka

Dear Rehana,

Your decision should depend not on what other people are saying but on why you got a divorce in the first place. If it was a well thought out decision and you still believe that there was no other alternative than there is no reason to go back now. It is very unlikely that your husband hasn't changed, he probably has all those qualities and traits for which you divorced him. Since you have reconciled to the new situation, there is no reason for you to consider remarriage with the same person at this point.

Dear Mita,

My new year resolution is not to get angry at my children when they refuse to do as I want them to. Two of them are grown up but give me more trouble than the youngest one who is only five. They never clean their room, or give their clothes to wash. I can never use the telephone because of them, they are selfish and only think about themselves. I am fed-up, what should I do?

Rana, Shantinagar, Dhaka

Dear Rana,

You seem to be very angry and if I may say so have already broken your New Years resolution. Your children who are teenagers I presume are acting like most kids their age. This is a strange and difficult time for them when defiance seem to be the only way they want to communicate in. I would not worry too much about it if I were you. Keep on trying, make them aware of their obligations and responsibilities towards the family, chances are they will stop being such a nuisance soon.

Dear Mita,

My daughter has decided to marry her first cousin against our wishes. No amount of coaxing, scolding or pleading will change her mind. We know she will never be happy and therefore cannot be a party to her decision. Some of our relatives think that we are being stubborn and unreasonable. Do you think so too. What should we do?

Anonymous, Dhaka

Dear Anonymous,

My first question is, How old is your daughter? If she is an adult than I am afraid there is not much you can do but hope for the best. You might be right but you might be wrong also. Ask yourself, is this really worth losing your daughter for? Not being a party to the most important decision of her life will further alienate her and leave scars that might be too difficult to heal in future.