

WEEKEND MUSINGS

Mahfuz Anam

Congratulations to the DU Debating Team

WEDNESDAY'S The Daily Star, along with several other newspapers, carried a picture of a Dhaka University debating team with Vice Chancellor Professor Emajuddin. The team became champion in an international debating competition in Brisbane, Australia. I would like to congratulate the team — consisting of two male and one female students — for bringing such exceptional honour to our country.

Given the deterioration of the standard of English education here, it is no small wonder that we continue to produce such exceptionally talented young men and women who not only hold their own, but even go to the extent of winning competitions in places like Australia. If I am not mistaken, I heard that some years back, another debating team from DU won a similar competition in Canada.

I must confess that the photograph triggered a whole range of nostalgic personal memory of my days, as a debater, first as a student of Notre Dame College, and later as that of Dhaka University. The reason I take this opportunity to talk about this subject is because I attach tremendous importance to the art of debating. The opportunities that now appears to be available to our students compared to what we got during sixties, are extraordinary. Our students must be encouraged to take full advantage of them. Opportunities make so much difference. I had my own modest success as a debater. But it all happened because the Lions Club happened to organise the then East Pakistan Inter-College Debating Competition during my college days, 1965-67. Then when I entered the University, quite suddenly, and pleasantly for me, the Esso Oil Company (the Pakistani branch of the global company) organised the All Pakistan Inter-University Debating Championship for three consecutive years, from 1967-68 to 1969-70, till the time of our Liberation War.

The All-Pakistan debates took me to Karachi and Lahore. That is how far I got. After Bangladesh, I went to Delhi to debate as a DU student. When I read about our University debating team going as far as Australia, I realised how much the world has become smaller, and how far more talented these young men and women must be compared to us. The chance of going to Karachi — the 1967-68 Inter-University Debating Championship hosted by the Karachi University — was such an exciting thing for me. I still vividly remember the day, within months of my joining the DU, when I was told by my provost (of Haji Md. Mohsin Hall), that the Vice Chancellor, Dr. M O Ghani, had asked me to see him. In those days being summoned by the VC was a big thing. I was quite anxious, and a bit frightened — for you seldom got summoned to the VC's office those days for anything pleasant. As I entered his office, which was in his official residence at that time, Dr. Ghani announced, in his very deep and decisive voice, that he had nominated me for the All Pakistan Debate in Karachi, to be held two months hence. For the next two months I spent sleepless nights in the excitement of travelling on a plane all by myself (I had travelled earlier with my parents, but I was school boy then) and going for this challenging event.

I wonder how the students, whose pictures I saw in the newspaper two days back, felt about going to Australia? Were they as excited going to that beautiful continent of a country, as I felt going to only another city, of what was then my own country?

For whatever it is worth, I would like to say that the art of public speaking has been of immense help in my life. It gave me self-confidence and the courage to articulate my views in public. The more I got into debates, the more I learnt to speak clearly. And more I learnt to speak clearly, automatically I learnt to think clearly, reason in a logical, sequential manner. This helped me immensely in day to day activities. As I learnt to speak clearly, I realised that people listened when I tried to explain something. The reason I am saying all this is because I think debating and public speaking should become an integral part of the learning process in all our schools, colleges and Universities. I think our politicians would be less rhetorical if they had some training in debates. The school TV debates, all will agree, are usually a treat to watch. How beautifully our young boys and girls argue on issues and make their points. One serious flaw with our national TV debates is the dull subjects that they are usually given. All controversial things are a no-no for them.

Bringing Good Cheer to Jamalpur Children

by Nancy Wong

MARTINE Gajentaan, wife of the Royal Netherlands ambassador, recently visited the Jamalpur branch of the school managed by the Society for the Care and Education of Mentally Retarded, Bangladesh.

Despite a four-hour long drive which included some bumpy stretches, the group which consisted of herself, Maria Schutte (wife of the Counsellor at the Netherlands embassy) and W Ph Billy Barnaart, a Dutch physiotherapist and specialist for mentally handicapped children, felt the journey was well worth it. They were greeted joyfully by students of that school, who were delighted with this special visit as they were presented with musical instruments such as sets of drums, samba balls worth Taka 20,000. They also received teaching aids to enliven their learning process.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mrs Gajentaan revealed that members of the Dutch community in Dhaka had raised Taka 150,000. This year in the annual bazaar of the Women's Volunteer Association, "This is our only fund raising project of the year and it was really

heartening to get so much response from our compatriots living and working here," she said.

A major Dutch garments buyer donated the bulk of apparel which ranged from T-shirts to jeans and blouses

quality which can soothe and cheer up sad spirits. Billy Barnaart regards musical instruments as essential tools in therapy for the mentally handicapped.

To show their appreciation, students of the SCEMRB, Jamalpur branch, staged a

cultural show for their distinguished guests.

A Dutch family, Da Costas, from the Netherlands embassy, joined in cheering up the students by giving the school a TV and VCR set.

which were snapped up by eager visitors to the bazaar. About twenty companies and consultant agencies involved in development work contributed cash and Dutch souvenirs to the fund raising drive.

As music has the magical

power to bring people together, the students were happy to have the Dutch family as their distinguished guests.

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