

Part two

Linc exchange

A COUPLE of months back, we got to share a cozy chit chat with the group of American students who had come to Bangladesh under the LINC (Linking Individuals, Knowledge and Culture) Exchange Program. For a quick refresher, this exchange was made to encourage collaboration between the youth of America and Bangladesh on issues of conflict

their US counterparts, the Bangladeshi participants had been selected based on their academic achievement, leadership ability, capacity to work in an intercultural situation, and their dedication to helping their local communities. Forms were sent to various local schools and ultimately, eight talented and lucky youngsters got selected.

Four of the students came from



resolution, youth leadership and volunteerism, and community service. Along the way, they also learned about each other's cultures. The LINC exchange program, funded by the United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Fairs was implemented in both the United States and Bangladesh by Relief International-Schools Online, an international NGO with a number of programs in the education sector.

During the course of our conversation with the Americans, we came to know their side of the story, their experiences, the kind of projects they worked on, and also their overall impression of Bangladesh.

Recently, a delegation of eight Bangladeshi secondary school students returned from a visit to the United States, completing the exchange. As in the case of

Sunamgonj (in the region of Sylhet): Ashok Chowdhury Bilas, A.K.M. Ruhul Amin Rubel, Bibekananda Sarker Dhruvo, and Chrysantheemum; three from Dhaka: Habiba Jeba, Shakila Akter Jahan, and Shucheta Shugufa; and one from Naogaon: Md. Saiful Islam.

The students spent three weeks in Southern California, specifically Los Angeles and Orange Counties, participating in a number of community service projects including mural painting with Red Cross Volunteers, distributing food, clothes, and other supplies to homeless people, habitat restoration, and other community-oriented projects. The students also participated in a variety of workshops where they shared community service experiences with other youth groups.

During the exchange, students had a chance to experience American culture first-hand. Each student lived with host families for ten days to give them the authentic experience of an American home and lifestyle. The students learned about the history of Los Angeles and about the diversity of its population. They visited the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Universal Studios, Hollywood, a professional baseball game, American high schools, and took part in a camping expedition in a National Park.

When asked about their experiences there, the students waxed eloquent on the discipline and efficiency of the Americans, which they felt was lacking in Bangladesh. A chirpy Chrysantheemum talked about the dignity of labour. The people there aren't afraid of work, and indeed, take pride in a job well done. Bright-eyed Habiba talked about how her interaction with the community she worked with there has instilled in her a new confidence in her own abilities, and inspired her to put more effort into everything she does. We also asked this group about the culture shock when they reached LA. A fiercely blushing Ashokh talked about how the free mixing in the American society took some getting used to, for people of a more conservative society as ours. Rubel summed up his problems in one line 'I didn't like the food.' On the whole, however, the exchange seemed to have been an enjoyable learning experience, and the group seemed more than satisfied with its overall achievement.

According to Lela Lantz, the LINC staff member who was responsible for the deshi delegates, now that they have returned to Bangladesh, the students will apply what they have learned about community service in their own areas. Each student has developed a community service project and will implement the project over the next six months. The projects address social concerns such as education, child labor, and environmental issues. Over the long-term, the students from both countries intend to stay in touch over e-mail and collaborate over the long distance, on various community service projects.

By Sabrina F Ahmad

Teen Diaries The shoe on the other foot

Recap: 'Teen Diaries' tells the story of four very different girls who attend RS High, and, in interacting with one another, learn to look beyond labels and see people as they really are. Over the past few weeks, we've seen the Queen Bee Prianka and her wannabe sidekick, the girly-girl Lamia pick on the new girl Sadia. Then in an unexpected fight, Prianka and Lamia call it splits, and Sadia ends up becoming Lamia's new best friend. The story now takes a different turn as the estranged Prianka finds herself doing a group assignment with the super-antisocial nerd Afrida. This week, we see it through Afrida's eyes.

Maya Angelou used to say, "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain." I bet she never had to face Prianka!

The whole thing started with Hafiz Sir handing us a group assignment in lieu of a quarter-term test. As luck would have it, I got saddled with Her Royal Popularity, Prianka. Ah well...at least it wasn't Lamia.

We decided to work at my place, because I have all my art stuff in the studio I fashioned after Dad's old study room. Prianka walked into my house, and I could have sworn I heard Cupid's darts, because she fell in love with my mother and vice versa. I couldn't believe it. I've seen Prianka faking her charms with teachers, and I tell you, this wasn't one of those



Sabrina '06

situations. She greeted Maa with a hug, and complimented her on our house, and Maa actually smiled and laughed as she asked Prianka about herself. We all had lunch together for the first time since my parents got divorced, and the two kept up a lively conversation throughout the entire meal!

I was finally able to pry the two of them apart, I dragged Prianka off to work and rounded on her, asking her what her game was. She didn't bother making a production out of the thing. She just shrugged and said I was lucky to have a mother who loved me so much. What do you say to that? I haven't spoken to the woman in two years, and that presumptuous pep-squad president tells me that my mother loves me. I'd laugh if it wasn't so pathetic.

On the bright side, we did get a lot of work done. Although she can't draw to save her life, Prianka at least knows her Biology...unlike the dunderheads she hangs out with. I figured I might get through this in one piece after all.

The only glitch in the whole afternoon was when she criticised my clothes, and suggested that I get a makeover. I told her it was none of her business, and that I thought she was just being silly, and she shot back with a quote from Wittgenstein, saying, "If people never did silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done."

I'm so glad she's gone back home now. I've been feeling confused ever since she walked in. This camaraderie with my mother, this sudden interest in my fashion sense...what did it all mean? What does Prianka have up her sleeve?

Good Lord, is that my mother singing downstairs? I think I better go investigate.

Prianka

By The Girl Next Door

How to find an alien in 10 minutes (or light years)

A LIEN hunting is a bit like falling in love with a girl who doesn't even know your name. You try to interpret everything she says and does as signs that she likes you. Similarly alien hunters would look everywhere for signs of aliens, try to hang on to the smallest clues and the most trivial events as signs of the presence of a mighty extraterrestrial. Now you might be thinking that the only place to look for aliens or super intelligent beings is up. Well think again. Not only people, no excuse me, scientists think that aliens could not only be up but could also be below us, under us, inside us and bizarrely in our beloved PCs too!! There is a possibility that your good 'ol clippy, the office assistant is an alien too! Ok, sounds interesting? Lets start.

Genetic Aliens:

Have you seen this movie called 2001: Space Odyssey? Probably not, 'cause its one of those movies which everyone knows about but no one has seen it. The writer Carl Sagan suggests that the best way for aliens to leave us a message is in the form of an intelligent artifact, something that can't be formed by nature. So if you see the words HEY YOU!! Etched on the face of the moon, you know aliens did it! Anyways, one of the ways for prospective intergalactic human hunters to leave us a message is to encode it in our genes. Genes have four bases. Lets say they are A,B,C and D. Now if we come upon a gene sequence

like: A, BB, CCC, DDDDD, AAAAAAA which can mean 1,2,3,5 and 7 we hit the jackpot! These are prime numbers and prime numbers can't randomly appear in the human genes. Apparently there are billions of genes in the genetic sequence, which have apparently no use it all. Interestingly all species of animals has these genes called 'junk-genes'. So aliens could very well use some kind of virus to mutate parts of the genes so that it resembles a sequence, a message from the stars if you like. The trick is finding it. And you know what, however crackpot this sounds, scientists are actually giving it a go- peering under microscopes to find out alien bibles.

Internet Aliens:

Now before you start imagining the aliens to jump out from our computer every time you log online, cool it. Internet aliens aren't really aliens at all. I mean for one thing they originated right here in earth. So how could they be called aliens? Think again. All non-human intelligent beings are aliens in some sense, right?

Anyways, lets start- say you have a rule. Take two initial numbers. Then add them up and then add the new number with the original number. Then you add the new number to the previous new number...and continue. You would soon have a really amazing sequence called Fibonacci Sequence. This is a simple example of a simple rule having a complex

outcome. Now you can make the starting rules more complex and you would have more interesting outcomes. Now, imagine you have a bunch of rules whose outcome is another program, which makes more rules, and then those rules make more rules. Some of those rules are self-consistent, some are not, some rules survive, and some don't. Some are randomly chosen and mixed with other rules and so on until you have a mighty complex program that can think! Possible? At least in theory says, Math Wiz and millionaire creator of popular software Mathematica, Wolfram. Thus in the cyber world of today and tomorrow which have limitless information and supercomputers controlling those information it can happen then a rogue set of program, some virus starts to build itself up, becoming more and more intricate step by step until it becomes the living!! Scary?? Yeah I know, but let me tell you its possible in theory. The virus could be evil or good, based on initial rules and so if its good we can talk with it. This would effectively be like talking to an alien, right? Bingo, cyber-alien found! Again, if you think all those stuff I just wrote are crackpot, stop and think about how life evolved on earth: Rules, laws, trial-and-error, chance and survival of the fittest- all those variables which eventually lead to the creation of human kind. See the parallels with our alien virus?

By Reggie