The 3rd AIUB Debate Week:

Word-Power Excelled in Glory

Dr. Faheem Hasan Shahed

On a television talk show some years back, an intellectual-cum-poet's remarks struck me. Referring to the disgraceful un-parliamentary discourse of our high profile politicians, he said that the average Bangladeshi, barring some exceptions, dislikes convincing others through rational discourse when it comes to facing differing views. Somehow there is this tendency inside us to expect unquestionable agreement from others whenever we talk on any issues. And the moment we see that someone is not accepting our opinions according to our desire, most of us engage our 'intellectual might' to brand others as 'omuk' or 'tomuk'. We do not argue rationally. We do not debate.

Little wonder why democracy doesn't properly work in our country, I thought.

Well, not everyone would buy this view. Like Bidit Lal Dey. My colleague in AIUB and the Moderator of AIUB Oratory Club (AOC). Bidit argued that since time immemorial, Bangalees have been prone to debates and intellectual discourse, and they have always accepted the better views from others. He cited examples from the Middle Age as well as the British Kolkata period in favour of his argument.

Despite my not fully agreeing with Bidit, I happily accepted some of his points due to the single factor. Bidit wasn't imposing anything on me; he was debating. I knew about his past debating achievements, especially during his IBA days, but what impressed me was his maintenance of this quality even today. I felt, once you are a debater, you actually are destined toward rational thinking till the end of your life.

Inhaling the last pint of smoke before officially discarding the cigarette outside the balcony, Bidit said, 'I agree Faheem bhai that we've been heading toward intellectual bankruptcy, but we can save ourselves by nourishing the culture of debate. And this has to start from schools on a compulsory basis.'

The 3rd AIUB Debate Week 2008, organized by the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) from 4 to 18 April, bore this crucial idea within: we need to train and create debaters for our society. In fact, it had a wonderful official motto to highlight: '...for the change that makes a difference.' And the slogan, taken from a famous Anjan Dutta number, would tell it all: '*Chawlo amrai, chawlo nijerai bawdlai*' (Let's change ourselves right away).

The involvement of The Daily Star, Radio Today FM 89.6 and Channel-1 as media partners added greater splendour to the event.

