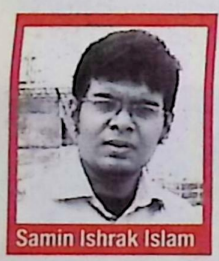
Rhetoric 2008


Samin Ishrak Islam

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SHOULD the European Union restrict its "developmental" foreign aid to democracies only, or should it, with the required criterion of a popularly elected government for their member countries, reserve the right to give out aid to whichever countries it finds suitable from a strategic point of view? It was a question of moral foreign policy versus strategic interest, and was the topic of the finals of Rhetoric 2008, contested between two teams from the National Law School of Bangalore.

Rhetoric '08 is an international debate tournament held annually since 2006 by the English Debating Society of Sri Venkateshwara College (University of Delhi). The debating culture in the Delhi University have shown phenomenal growth in the last two years, in its debating quality as well as with its organizational ambitions : the sub-continent will be witnessing the first ever SAARC-Debating Championship next year. With perpetual mistrust between its two giant members and the organization's perceived ineffectiveness, this youth exchange program, opening its doors for the future leaders from all across its member countries, could very easily be the "small step" acting as the "giant leap" for this hibernating regional co-operation union. The Bangladeshi Debating contingent, especially North South University, had a lot to do to make this dream seem achievable.

Wahidul Bari, the general secretary of the North South University Debating Club, was the only Bangladeshi, in fact, the only international adjudicator in the group of 24, the rest being all Indians, who "broke" into the "octos", and he judged the quarter finals rounds as well. He also took part in the pre-council meeting in which the SAARC-DC was conceived, and his suggestions regarding time-line and format changes will be implemented in next year's SAARC-championship.

Sinha Ibne Humayun, breaking adjudicator of Seoul Asians and one of the ACAs (Assistant Chief Adjudicator) of the 15th All Asians, was asked to assume a similar role, of DCA (Deputy Chief Adjudicator) at the Rhetoric '08 competition, and was the only non-Indian member in that exclusive panel. His work was lauded by the EDS. SVC's president and he was thanked numerous times in the opening and the closing ceremony, and he became everyone's respected Sinha "Bhai".

Last but not the least is Mushfiq Wahed Rusho, the "TAB director" of the tournament. I realize that many of the readers are non-debaters, so it should suffice to say that TAB is a rather complicated software that ensures fairness in the match-ups. Mushfiq was the only known person in Bangladesh with experience of using this particular application, and the organizers of Venkateshwara College could not find expertise in India who could better full-fill this role than him. The Bangladeshi debating fraternity had supplied its illustrious neighbor with human resources they could not find at home!

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With the first SAARC-Debating Championship coming up next year, it will give Bangladeshi teams an opportunity to participate in a potentially major international tournament on a regular basis. The Worlds and Asians are hosted in places ranging from Cork-Ireland to Seoul-South Korea, and if this tournament is organized successfully, it will provide a platform for Bangladeshi teams to compete in international standard debates year-in year-out and give these students an opportunity to travel abroad and interact with their peers from a different cultural background. The opportunities and possibilities of this tournament are limitless, and the Bangladeshi contingent and NSU-DC should be proud about the role it played in laying the first brick of this big dream.