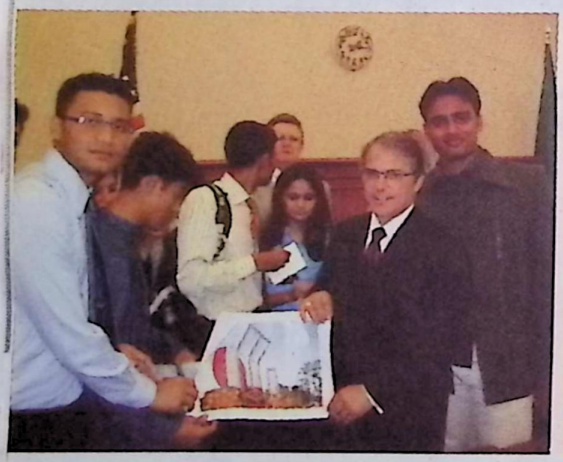
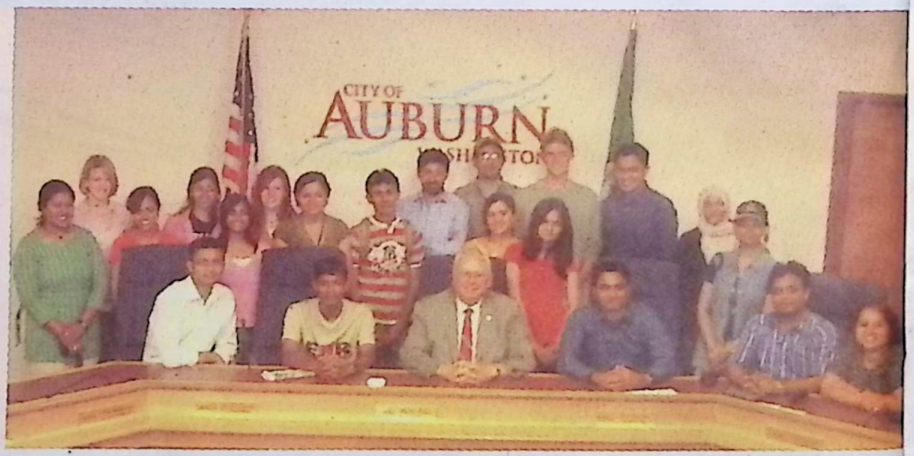
Transcending Boundaries

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THIS year, the US State Dept. sponsored Undergraduate Leadership Program, which was hosted in the University of Vermont and at the Green River Community College, Washington, of which I was a part. The program was called 'Study of the US Institutes for the Student Leaders' and it comprised of students from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. I never thought this program would change my life completely; at the end of one month, I had become good friends with quite a few Indians and Pakistanis.

In the introductory class on our first day, like everyone else I was also asked to introduce myself so I stood up and said, "I am Sajid Mahbub from Bangladesh" and my study status. The boy who was sitting beside me was from India and his name was Saju. When his turn came he stood up and said "Hi I am Saju from South Asia", to which everyone in the classroom was astonished! Dr. Bruce asked him again and he gave the same answer; the process of transcending boundaries had just started.

Almost everyday in the classroom or outside of the classroom we discussed the disputes we have and had among us. We talked freely and frankly and were very clear with our arguments. We discussed our history, which is unfortunately full of conflicts. One day we came to the realization that *we have fought for freedom, we have fought for religion, we have fought for power, but have we have never fought for peace.*

We are not against of our nationalism, we are always proud for our respective countries and what we are but we were looking for a common platform from where we can solve our problems where we can have a common identity.

Our days passed with classes on American history, foreign policy, and American culture. We were going out for different field visits including historical places and big companies. We went to the Microsoft and Boeing offices and to the University of Washington.

Soon enough, we noticed we were left with just four more days and were nearing the end of our program! We became very sad and could hardly imagine living without our friends. Before the departure, we had to give a presentation in front of the college people. We started working for the presentation but apart from the official presentation one of my very close friend Nasir from Pakistan made a different plan.

Nasir told us a sad story of his grandfather, how he had lost his closest friend during the partition and how he still cries for him. Everyone in the hall room went silent. Then Nasir presented Miguel (from India) a Pakistani National Flag on behalf of his country and everyone was touched by that. Then Nasir called me and apologized on behalf of the Pakistani people to the Bangladeshi people for the atrocities of war during 1971 and gave me his national flag as a plaque of peace and harmony.

My grandfather, who was a freedom fighter, died in 1971. There are many more like me, who have lost their fathers, husbands, brothers, sisters and children. I regarded them as a salute to them and a homage to their blood.

It is us who have to take initiatives. I believe each and every student of Bangladesh is an ambassador of Bangladesh, if they start to work for peace then there is no force which can resist them, it is only them who can make a difference, who can transcend the boundaries; the boundaries of nations, the boundaries of corruption, the boundaries of hatred.