

## World debate champions

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Tell us something about the team

The team consists of me (Aaqib) and Ratib. We are both BRAC University students. I (Aaqib) am a BBA student in my final semester and have two majors, Finance and Management. Ratib graduated from Economics. We have both been involved in debating at school and university levels. I (Aatib) am currently the president of BRAC University Debating Club. We first teamed up a year ago just before World Universities Debating Championships 2011-2012 which was held in Manila, Philippines.

tell us a bit about becoming the world champions

We prepared for this championship for the last one year. We competed in smaller scale international tournaments (such as the Asian Championships) and in almost every national championship held this year in Bangladesh. The goal was always to be the first Bangladeshi team to break into the quarterfinals of the World Universities Debating Championships (WUDC) ESL and the first team to win the championship (ESL stands for English as Second Language).

Tell us about the journey to WUDC

We travelled from Dhaka to Berlin, Germany via a layover in Istanbul, Turkey (we used the layover time to explore Istanbul for a few hours – it is a beautiful city!). After we arrived in Berlin and WUDC started, there were 9 rounds of extempore debates (meaning the topic was only released 15 minutes before the debate started). The top 16 ESL teams from the 400+ teams from 82 countries that participated in WUDC broke into the quarter finals.

how tough was the competition?

The competition was very tough, held in Europe, there was a lot of European teams and judges so we kind of walked into the lions den. A lot of the judges were more inclined to understanding western/first world perspective and examples more than typical Bangladeshi/third world ones. However, we prepared with this in mind, we watched a lot of videos of old debates by former champions and we had extensive practice sessions on difficult topics back in Bangladesh – it paid off for us.

did brac university support the team?

BRAC University has always been supportive of the debate club and has taken a lot of pride in our achievements. The costs of travelling abroad to take part in foreign competitions is quite high but BRACU has always done its best to support the debate teams financially and to applaud our achievements. In this particular championship, it's safe to say we would not have been able to participate without university assistance. We hope and expect this wonderful trend of support to continue for future teams.

Tell us about your achievements so far

Our team (Aaqib and Ratib) became champions in three national inter-varsity debate championships.

This WUDC was the first World Championship that Bangladesh has ever won. Ratib won the audience choice for best speaker of the Final. So, BRAC University Debate Club is not only one of the most decorated and successful clubs in BRACU, also amongst all university clubs of Bangladesh. At a school level (I went to Sunbeams School), I had won 3 inter-school national championships as well.

What qualities should a good debater have?

Generally speaking you need to work hard and be knowledgeable. You need to be confident while speaking and listen carefully to understand what the opponent is saying. There are many factors that make a debater competitive. Some of them are related to the environment you grow up or study in, some of them are skills you acquire through learning and practice.

Debate then and debate now - what are some of the visible changes that you have notice in recent years?

Debate has always been a matter of prestige, but English debate in Bangladesh is definitely the strongest now than it has ever been. This is the result of new ideologies and tournaments being brought into the local circuit. We've always been one of top nations in WUDC in terms of participation and the culture of debate here is vibrant and competitive. However, this time around there is a new confidence in the debating community here since we won the world championship. I expect this to herald a new golden era for Bangladesh in international tournaments. There was a psychological barrier that held us back before, it has now been broken. More international achievements should follow. Internationally, debate is always evolving, it's not good enough to just improve, we need to improve enough to keep up with the debaters from other countries. The bar rises very quickly and it never falls. You either match it or you get left behind. Nowadays, we see Australasian teams doing very strongly in all categories compared to other parts of the world.

what else do you do?

Well, both of us are planning to do our Masters abroad. I (Ratib) is working at Economic Research Group (ERG) at the moment. I (Aaqib) will begin my internship soon. I'm fond of reading, video games, mixed martial arts and am also currently training in Krav Maga. I (Ratib) am a big fan of cricket and classical music. Outside debate, we are very different people.

What are your future plans?

The two of us have retired from debating actively because we are at the end of our undergraduate lives. However, we will both be involved in debating as adjudicators. We want to pass on our experience to debaters in the national circuit while also adjudicating in international tournaments to gain experience. I (Aaqib) am the current coach of the Bangladesh national team for the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC) which will be held in January 2013 in Antalya, Turkey. The school team is very strong and I have high hopes/expectations for them. This is my immediate priority. Other than that, we both plan to debate again someday later on, perhaps during our Masters or PHD studies.