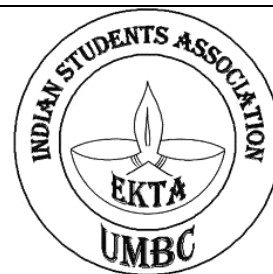




|| srishti ||

Newsletter of EKTA,
The Indian Students' Association at UMBC
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President: Uttara Korad

Secretary: Minal Mishra

Editor: Poorva Arankalle



From the Editor's Desk

- Poorva Arankalle

Hello All,
Spring time is about to spring!!! One look at the blossomed trees with all the lovely colors around you, and you

know that spring is here to stay. It is the time of the year for picnics and it would be incomplete without participating in the Cherry Blossom Festival held annually at Washington DC. It is an amazing event and every one of us needs to take a break from our "always" busy schedule and enjoy this season.

There is a fascinating story of persistence behind the Cherry Blossoms. It begins in 1885, when Mrs. Scidmore visited Japan and fell in love with the cherry trees or "Sakura" as they are called in Japanese. She then suggested adorning the city with these trees. However, her plans fell to deaf ears for more than two decades. Finally, in 1909, she contacted the then First Lady Helen Taft and offered to donate trees. Dr. Takamine, a Japanese chemist, also joined the action and offered to donate 2,000 trees. However, when the trees arrived from Japan into the capitol, they were found to be infested and had to be burned. Not to be discouraged, Dr. Takamine agreed to donate additional trees, and finally the first two trees were planted by the First Lady Taft and the wife of the Japanese Ambassador. The two trees are still standing today in the now well-known Potomac Park. Interestingly, the story doesn't end here. During World War II, the cherry grove in Japan that had originally provided the trees fell into bad shape and the National Park Service provided cuttings from the Tidal Basin. A perfect example of "As you shall sow so you shall reap"?

The National Cherry Blossom festival is a celebration of nature's bountiful and wondrous gifts. The delicate pink and white blossoms amidst the backdrop of several national monuments make a spectacular view. The festival also has a plethora of other attractions like parades, kite flying, art exhibitions, and cultural events. This year, the festival is from the 27th of March to the 11th of April, 2004. Due to the capricious weather, viewing the blossoms in full bloom requires a fair share of luck. It would be a good idea to check the peak-bloom time before planning a visit. Plus, it is a perfect place for all you budding photographers to put your skills into practice and showcase your talents. So, get out of your homes and don't miss out on the blossoms.

On another note, this is my last issue as the editor of Srishti as I hand over reins to Aarti Gupta. I would like to say a big thank-you to all those who have helped me during my brief stint as the editor. I wish Aarti good luck and I am confident that she will do a great job. Hope you all enjoy reading this issue as much as I did compiling it. So, here's wishing you all happy spring and happy reading.



Prez Sez

- Uttara Korad

Hello my friends! After enjoying a refreshing spring break and amazing Indo-Pak ODI cricket series, EKTA at UMBC welcomes you all back to the school. EKTA at UMBC provides Indian students a platform to put forward their thoughts and share their experiences. Let me take this opportunity to brief you with recent activities, in and around EKTA.

Let's start with our biggest event of the year - the annual Diwali function. Last October, we celebrated Diwali on campus. It was a grand socio-cultural event attended by our UMBC students, alumni, faculty and families in Baltimore. There was dance, drama, music and lots of masti. The show truly celebrated the festive mood of Diwali. We received several compliments for the show. So, a BIG Thank you to all dear UMBCites - the success of this huge event is attributed to your efforts.

This semester, besides screening the Hindi movies, we also organized a special session to help new batch students for filling their very first tax returns in United States. Anand Patwardhan conducted this information session which all I am sure all new students found really helpful. This semester, EKTA executive committee has many new faces. Shailesh Nene took the charge from former treasurer Tushar Chaubal and Minal Mishra is now our new administrative secretary. Anand Patwardhan is our new vice-president and Alark Joshi is our new web master. Aarti Gupta will be assistant editor to help our Editor Poorva Arankalle. A new mailing group has been set up for the new students who will join UMBC in fall 2004. Aseem Lalani, Kamalika Das and Archana Raamanathan have taken the responsibility to assist the new group with their queries, and arrange for pick up and accommodation. I wish this team good luck in its gigantic mission.

Once again I thank all of you who have made our efforts count; we hope to see the same enthusiasm and participation from you in future.



Instant Food

- Aseem Lalani

1. Take some frozen vegetables
2. Stir - Fry them till they become soft
3. Empty a packet of Parampara Masala with 250 ml of water into it
4. Let it boil for 20 mins till water evaporates and you get gravy of desired consistency.

What are you waiting for ... go eat it!

Time Management for Graduate Student

- Adapted from a book by Holger Karl

Holger Karl, now a professor at the Telecommunications Networks Group at Berlin demonstrated in his book an excellent way for international students to manage their studies here in the US. He has added his own experience of studying in the US (himself being a Russian). I have tried to make a short summary of his findings.

Please turn to the last page to read more...



Me, Myself and Advisor...

- Karthik Gurumurthy

I became a columnist for Srishti on a lark. I just printed out the last copy of Srishti and an announcement told me that Dec 15 was the deadline for submitting an application for a column. I looked at my watch, decided that two hours was enough and turned in an application.

After my first column, however, I started taking the job very seriously. I had seen my name in print, and I was now famous. People would hotly debate my columns over lunch. I would overhear friends nearly come to blows as one called me a hero while the other called me a knave. I would be called upon to express my views at various campus events, and the president Dr. Hrabowski would invite me to lunch in recognition of my influence over the Student body.

All of this never happened, of course. Over the course of two years, I got a pretty good idea of exactly how influential an Op-Ed piece in Srishti is. It never discouraged me, though. It was good enough for me that my friends came up and told me, often in extremely colorful language, what they thought of my column. For this article, I thought of writing something worthwhile which might help the Graduate students.

I graduated from school after five long years last summer. During the time, I have seen the best and worst of science and scientists: the fierce competition with other researchers, the frustration and self-doubts when things are not working, the pettiness and jealousy of one's colleagues and competitors, and the joy of doing and seeing something that has never been done or seen before. I believe institutional measures could alleviate the three major sources of stress, which include the following:

* Lack of a clear "end point". Many graduate students never know how much they need to achieve before they can get their degree. When one of my colleagues asked his advisor about the "end point", his advisor answered, "When I feel you've got a thesis worthy of a degree from this university." Such an answer is useless to a graduate student, who often has to balance research with numerous other concerns. Also, it is unfair to demand four years or more from a graduate student without giving the student some concrete ideas for how to finish his or her degree.

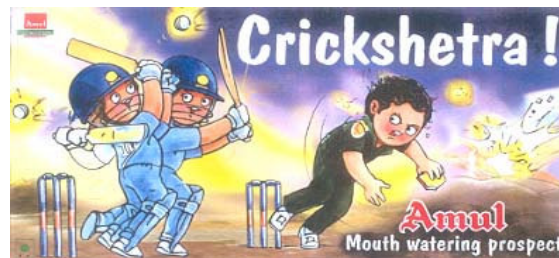
* Lack of information on an advisor's style and track record with previous students. This problem is particularly acute for a beginning graduate student. Personally, I knew almost nothing about my advisor's style before I entered his group. So I was unprepared for his "hands-off" supervisory method and often felt he was not giving me enough guidance. A significant source of stress would have been alleviated had I known beforehand what my advisor expected from his students and what his past co-workers thought of him.

* Lack of advisor training: Some professors simply have no idea how to train graduate students. For example, I once asked a second-year graduate student why he fitted his data in a particular way, because other functional forms seemed equally effective to me. His answer was "[My advisor] thought it should be done this way, so we never tried anything else." How can we expect this student ever to become an independent scientist? I believe poor guidance is partly the result of the advisor having no professional training in how to advise students. Such professional training would help some faculty members.

So what should be done...?

Wait until next Srishti comes up...

The Taste of India...



On the competitive India - Pak Cricket Series - March '04

[Courtesy: <http://www.amul.com>]



The Indian Juggernaut Rolls

- Balaji Sadasivam

Sixteen guys decided to visit our neighboring country a few weeks ago under the leadership of the "Bengal Tiger". They had just spent a successful Australian summer amongst the Kangaroos. This tour to Pakistan had assumed a lot of significance because this was the first visit in nearly a decade. Our "boys" were scheduled to play 5 one day games and 3 tests. This tour was in the spotlight for a long time due to security issues. This "Peace mission", as the politicians call it, had been big media hype for the past month. From a common man's perspective, let us not forget that we were at war a few years ago at Kargil. Anyways, let me write about cricket now.

Records have been set and landmarks surpassed in the tour so far. The Indian one day batting lineup resembles a tomahawk nuclear cruise missile unit. The most destructive warhead is at the front, in the form of Sehwag and Sachin. These two tore apart the Pakistani bowling line-up time and again. Next comes the anchoring mechanism for the warheads in Laxman and Ganguly. The system is designed with two anchoring mechanisms, since the reliability factor for one of them is very low (I am sure you would have guessed which one it is). The think tank decided to have two of them with a hope that one of the two will come good on a given day. The delicate guiding mechanisms are located in the middle with the most reliable and ever consistent Rahul Dravid. The powerhouse and the thrusters were present in Yuvraj and Kaif coming down the order. To add some extra fire power to the already destructive unit, we have some turbo boosters in Zaheer and Balaji. They seem to keep hitting sixes, at will, when it comes to the death overs. As far as the bowling goes, all it takes to defend any total is to bowl 10 wicket taking deliveries. In this respect, Irfan Pathan once again proved his talents by picking up crucial wickets throughout the series and Balaji proved his worth by bowling consistent tight spells. The icing on the cake for the bowling department was the last over bowled by Nehra to take us home in the first one-dayer. Kaif set new benchmarks in taking catches in the deep. Every team has its ups and downs but at the end of the day this unit set record scores of 349 and chased scores in excess of 290 to clinch the one day series with a 3-2 tally.

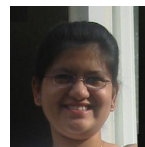
The start of the test series had huge expectations of the battle between a huge crushing force (Dravid and Sachin) and an immovable object (Akhtar and Saqlain). The absence of Sourav Ganguly was expected to boost up the batting line up further. As it turned out, a new hero, Sehwag, emerged scoring a record 309 in the first innings. His innings portrayed his character as a batsman who is not only a big demolisher but also a person hungry for big scores. His partnership with Sachin made sure that we would not lose the test. Dravid's declaration when Sachin was on 194 raised a few eyebrows across the nation. The point to be noted here is that the Indian team has started performing as a team rather than looking for

individualistic glories. The bowlers did a commendable job in picking up 20 Pakistani wickets in less than 7 sessions. The Pakistani players have now resorted to tactics like preparing bowler friendly pitches with the hope that they can try to put up a challenge to the Indian Juggernaut.

The prayers and hopes of millions of Indians across the globe act as fuel for the nuclear missile mentioned in the early part of the article. Irrespective of caste and creed, all Indians unite when it comes to cricket. A typical cricket viewing session in Westland Gardens will start with people walking in at midnight battling the cold and the rain. We have lucky places assigned to each one of us, where we are supposed to sit. Strategic changes are made to these seats when Pakistan has an upper hand in the game and usually such changes bring out a change in fortune for us. Here I would like to refer the readers to an article that was published in Times of India a few weeks ago, which said that the Indian camp also has its own lucky places for the players sitting in the pavilion. Every shot flying off the Indian batsmen's willow brings out shouts of ecstasy from everyone. The most ecstatic moments are when some Pakistani batsmen get out. The eruption is spontaneous. When it comes to running between the wickets, we start shouting "yes, no, wait and stay" out of excitement as if the players are robots controlled by our voice. Innings break calls for a trip to Dunkin Donuts where we get our coffee and donuts. This is the time for discussing strategies and game plans. The discussions are so serious that one may get the feeling that it is a discussion between John Wright and Sourav Ganguly. The best part of the day is when the game is about to get over. We start praying and chanting mantras (of course to ourselves) and there were instances when we got so engrossed in our prayers that we did not even talk to the next person even though Balaji hit a huge six over long on off Akhtar. The emotions and sentiments run so deep that one of us stopped watching cricket because India lost the two games that the person saw.

At the end of the day, we leave for our homes with a lot of mental satisfaction if we win or with hopes of a better performance in the next game. I would say that the 7 hours that we spend in front of the TV are the most nerve racking moments I can ever have. I would not advise people having heart problems, blood pressure problems and pregnant women to see the games with us in the future. I would like to finish by saying that this Indian Juggernaut will come back to India walking over the ruins of Rawalpindi and looking ahead to bringing pride and glory to millions of Indians across the globe.

- An Ardent Cricket Fan



A Trip to Florida

- Kamalika Das

"When spring break sucks, you know you are in graduate school" -Dr. Desjardins.

Like most of us in UMBC buried under piles of books and papers for midterms, thesis, paper deadlines, I was starting to get scared of my spring-break workload, when I got lucky enough to get a chance to go to Miami. In ten

days of the extended spring break I forked out for myself, I got to see some of the most beautiful places on this earth. This is for all who wish to see Florida in a week.

Miami - It is a happening place, the major attraction being Miami South Beach. The weather here at this time of the year is perfect for all kinds of outdoor activities. The Atlantic here is at its best. The color of the sea varies from azure to turquoise blue at different times of the day. But for feeling the real pulse of the place, it's best to go there on weekends when the entire city seems to have poured in here to enjoy the amazing weather and to participate in a variety of activities starting from beach volleyball to open air parties in the evening. If serenity is the keyword, Key Biscayne is the ideal place to visit. From here one can get the best view of Miami downtown.

Orlando - There are so many places to see here, that even a fortnight is not enough. It is about 4 hours drive from Miami. The major centers of attraction here are Walt Disney World, Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure. There are about six different theme parks in Disney World itself. Due to time crunch, I was able to see only one of them and probably the best - Epcot(Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow).The road leading to it is lined with pink buildings and everything in this area called "Downtown Disney" seem to be part of a fairytale. Another place of attraction worth mentioning is the Kennedy Space Center. This is the only place on earth where one can tour launch areas, meet an Astronaut, see giant rockets, train in spaceflight simulators, and even view a launch.

Keywest - Famous for being the southernmost point of USA, this place much more to describe it. Firstly, the journey to Keywest through the other Florida keys is an experience of a lifetime. It's a pleasure to feast your eyes on the vast stretch of different shades of blue on both sides of the road - the Atlantic on the left and the Gulf of Mexico on the right. Each of the keys is an individual island joined to the mainland by bridges, one of which is seven miles long. The beach at Keywest is one of the main hubs of activity. However, according to me the most amazing thing to see there is the sunset. Only in Key West does the sun shine brightest when it sets. Everyone gathers for the never planned, always varied Sunset Celebration on the Mallory Dock.

Whatever I saw in these ten days was amazing. But I am sure that whatever I have missed must be equally engrossing. So I plan to go back there sometime for a longer vacation.

Uncharted territory

It's we who define borders and race
A rat from a cat, in every case
But some times life comes in the face
And smears the thoughts and wipes the slate

The unspoken word causes the fright
A slap on the face or mango delight,
Riding the crescent wave of might,
It shudders the claws of a silent kite

How often we think something is true,
But deny ourselves for want of blue
Till someone tells to come and light
The dampened spirit of a starry night

Why the fate why the glare
The ambivalence of a nightmare
Of an indecisive thread of care
That takes the guts to go bare

Why oh lord is this crystal maze
That goes apart in a fit of gaze
When it's me and you who make a case
And mend the borders and change the race.



- Abhishek Desai

Instant Food (Continued from page 2)

- Aseem Lalani

Congratulations!
You have just managed to waste 5 minutes of
your precious time reading this. BTW, who is this
Holger Karl?

It's an April issue ☺

Acknowledgements: Thank-you to Andy and Aarti for their help with this issue. Also, a big thank-you to all who contributed with articles - Balaji (an ardent cricket fan), Karthik, Abhishek, Aseem, and of course Uttara.