

## Journey of a lifetime: The 34<sup>th</sup> International Physics Olympiad

*By Hamood Arham – The weakest link of the team that represented Pakistan at the 34<sup>th</sup> IPhO, now willing away doing a BS in Physics at Michigan State University*

I was walking down the hallway of the Physics building at Michigan State University when something suddenly caught my eye. It was a backpack. Like all other backpacks it had the requisite zippers and the shoulder straps. However, there was something unique about this bag. There was a familiar insignia emblazoned on its front. To the backdrop of the map of Taiwan, the sign proudly proclaimed “34<sup>th</sup> IPhO 2003” (with the faces of Newton and Einstein filling in the zeros of 2003). The subheading “34<sup>th</sup> International Physics Olympiad” in English and Taiwanese characters finished the logo. Seeing the Olympiad logo after over three years and more than 12000 km away from Taipei was a nice surprise. Pleasant memories of an experience of a lifetime flooded my senses. I felt obliged to go over and talk to the owner of the backpack.

It was a typical hot summer day when Dr. Abdullah Sadiq, Dr. Masroor Ikram, Umair Sadiq and I set out from Islamabad. Our flight to Taipei was from Lahore and we had a long drive ahead of us. The other three members of our team, Wajahat Faheem Khan, Talal bin Akram and Ahmed Qureshi were going to join us at the airport. I was feeling nervous excitement and was wondering if the whole Olympiad experience was going to be as good as people had made it sound. The drive to Lahore was punctuated with discussions revolving around Physics. One particular discussion that I recall had something to do with determining the radius of the earth from the shadow cast by an object due to the sun. Needless to say, I pretended to be asleep for most of the journey to Lahore.

All five of us team members were very thrilled about representing Pakistan at the Physics Olympiad. In a sense, our journey had started over a year ago when we had appeared for the NPTC initial screening test and now we were almost at the finish line. The stories regaled to us by the veterans of the Turkish and Indonesian Olympiads had been tantalizing and I was finding it hard to believe that I was now joining their ranks.

The Olympiad was a ten day long fun-filled extravaganza (minus the five hours each for the theoretical and experimental exams on the third and the fifth days). The Welcome Party on our first night was remarkable with acrobatics and traditional dance displays. The Opening Ceremony was presided by the President of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian, who said, “Like the Olympic Games, the IPhO brings together the best and the brightest from around the world for a fair competition. Regardless of who claims the ultimate victory, the friendships you make among your fellow contestants will be the most precious award.”

The Olympiad was very well organized with visits to museums, national monuments, amusements parks and scenic locales. Separate accommodation had been arranged for the students and the team leaders. No more determining earth’s radius from sunlight or other such discussions. However, when we did meet up with the professors for dinner receptions, Dr. Masroor Ikram always had useful suggestions for taking better photographs from the cameras by controlling the background light. All the students had been housed at the Grand Taipei Hotel and we traveled in a convoy of buses from one place to the next. It seemed as if the dozen buses with nearly 250 students from 54 countries were on a nonstop whirlwind tour of Taiwan. We were also treated to talks by Nobel laureate Prof. Samuel C.C Ting and Prof. Paul C. W. Chu, President of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

The part of the Olympiad that I enjoyed the most was meeting people of my age from all over the globe and listening to all sorts of English accents. With so many participants and so few days it was impossible to get to know everyone personally. However, we got to spend a lot of time together with the other students during the bus rides and the sightseeing trips.

The Olympiad experience was enhanced greatly by the efforts of the dedicated guides appointed with each team. Our guide was Stella Yu-Wen Wang who was always making sure that we reached everywhere on time and did not get lost in the city. After all, none of us knew the local language and it would have been a chore navigating our way back to the team hotel.

It was with a heavy heart that I boarded the bus taking us to the airport to fly out of Taiwan. It had been a priceless experience and my only regret was that it had ended so soon. The driveway leading to our hotel had been decorated with large, brightly-coloured flags with the Olympiad logo. On the last night after the closing ceremony, we had all rushed to grab them as souvenirs. The onlookers were taken aback by the enthusiasm with which the flags were being pulled down, but it only showed how much all the participants had enjoyed the event and how eager they were to take away mementos of it with them.

The organizers provided us with t-shirts, backpacks, personal pouches, lapel pins and other such clutter with the Olympiad logo stamped on them. They even printed out special Taiwanese postal stamps with our pictures on them. It was such a backpack that caught my eye in Michigan that day. The owner, from Taiwan, had been involved in the organization of the event and while we had not met during the course of the Olympiad, we had a good time walking down memory lane together.

*(Hamood Zafir Arham participated in NPTC 7 during the year 2002/2003. He represented Pakistan at the 34th International Physics Olympiad held in Taipei, Taiwan in August 2003. After his A Levels Hamood won the University Distinguished Scholarship at Michigan State University to cover 4 years of undergraduate study. Hamood plans to graduate from Michigan State University with a BS in Physics in May 2008 and start graduate school in Physics the fall of the same year.)*



**Dr Sarwar Khan with some other participants in 16<sup>th</sup> IBO 2005, China**



**Dr Sarwar Khan with President IBO and Pakistani IBO team in Argentina**



**Dr Sarwar Khan with Pakistani IBO Team in Saskatoon Canada, 2007**

## A Memoir of 17th IBO, Argentina

*Annam Asif*

For the past few years many science competitions and Olympiads are being organized in different parts of the world. The basic purpose of such events is to bring students from different countries at one place so that they can compete with each other in their respective fields of knowledge. Such a competition, the International Biology Olympiad, was held in Argentina from 9-16 July, 2006 and I was one of the fortunate ones to be selected to participate in it through various stages of screening tests at the national level. It was the first ever participation of Pakistan in any international biology competition at the high school level. Our team consisted of five members: Muhammad Sherkoh Qaisarani, Iram Mohsin and me along with Dr. Sarwar and Dr. Farwa, who were our leader and deputy leader respectively.

We departed for our destination on 7th July and after a very hectic, tiring, yet enjoyable journey of about 2 days, ultimately landed at Rio Cuarto, where the entire event was going to be held. The very next morning, the participants of all the countries were first separated from their leaders to the respective hotels where they provided us the schedule of the upcoming week along with some accessories for the exam. The next morning we left for the opening ceremony in the cultural theatre.

In the opening ceremony, participants of all the countries, wearing their national dresses and holding their flag went on stage where a very enthusiastic audience, consisting of members of IBO committee, judges and chief guests welcomed them. It was really a very great feeling for all of us when the name Pakistan was announced. The audience's response on the first ever participation of Pakistan in an IBO was also very thrilling. It was a great privilege for us to represent our country in front of fifty other countries. After that a cultural dance, with themes and songs of typical Argentinean culture were presented, which were thoroughly enjoyed by everyone, competitors as well as judges. Next in the ceremony, was the address of the President of IBO who informed us about the rules and regulations of the competition and also about the main aims of holding events like IBO.

We had our practical exam the next day, consisting of four parts, each about an hour long. The four sections of the practical exam were related to Biochemistry, Plant Biology, Animal Biology and Biotechnology. The written test was held on the very next day and consisted of two sections. Though we all did well in the theory, we had a bit of a problem in the practical exams because we hadn't been exposed to that much practical work during our coursework as well as the training in our own country. Then, after the test was over, we were ultimately free from all burdens.

After a hectic and studious routine of three consecutive days, finally we started enjoying our stay. We interacted with the other teams, discussed their educational system, culture and lots more. We were given a tour of the city, Rio Cuarto, where we got a chance to visit some important buildings and places, schools, shopping malls and closely observed the way of life of the citizens. We also spent some time pleasantly in playing games but the most interesting part of our stay was the hiking. Though it was exhausting, it was great fun.

Thus, the IBO was not only a competition to make the young generation aware of the challenges in the field of biology, but also a platform where all the students from different parts of the world can interact. Lastly, we had the closing ceremony in which medals were awarded to the students for their extraordinary performance and by the grace of Almighty; my team mate Muhammad Sherkoh was able to win a bronze medal for our country. That was a very cherishing moment as he had lighted the name of his country through his diligence. Maybe, if I had worked a bit harder, then I would have been one of those fortunate to win. In the later half of the ceremony, the hosts again presented some cultural dances and the President of the IBO also addressed us in which he congratulated the organizing community of 17th IBO for arranging such a healthy and successful

event, and the students for showing discipline and good interaction. At the end, the competitors said goodbye to each other and also exchanged small gifts as a token of their regard and remembrance.

Simply stating it, to participate for the first time in the IBO as a Pakistani was really an awesome experience, a wonderful opportunity and a great platform for me through which I was not only exposed to the new advancements in biology and to the challenges of advancing science, but also learned about the education system of other countries. I made some good friends there who I stay in touch with regularly. My IBO experience has also motivated me to do my level best in upgrading our national education standard. The pleasant memories of those days, the knowledge I gathered and the company of my friends made it an unforgettable experience. I would advise upcoming students who want to do something more productive and beneficial than their routine studies and tasks, to participate in such competitions.

*(The author, Annam Asif is currently a student of M.B.B.S. (1st year) at Rawalpindi Medical College, Rawalpindi. She was in pre-medical when she took her NSTC-2 screening test after doing matriculation from Siddeeq Public School. By the grace of Almighty, she qualified to participate in the 17th IBO held at Rio Cuarto, Argentina from 9 to 16th July 2006)*



**Dr Khalid M khan and Dr Shaiq ali with Pakistani IChO team in South Korea, 2006**

**Pakistani IChO Team is passing through the crowd in Moscow, Russia, 2007**

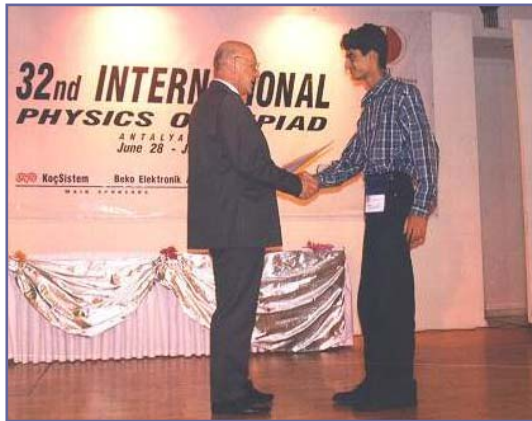


**Mr. Ahmed Mahmood Qureshi with first Pakistani IMO team in 46<sup>th</sup> IMO in Mexico, 2005**

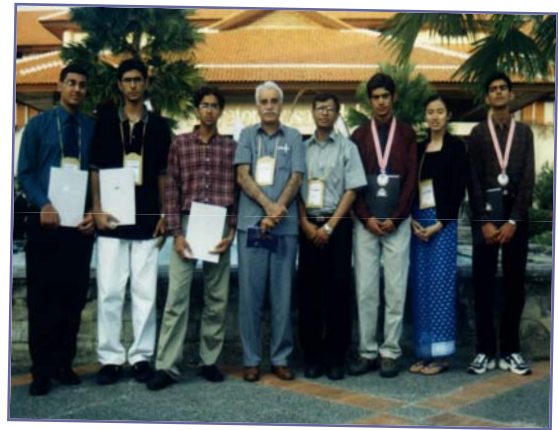
**Dr A D Raza Choudary, DG SMS with Pakistani IMO Team in 47<sup>th</sup> IMO in 2006**



**Pakistani IMO Team with deputy Team Leader Mr Ahmed Mahmood Qureshi in Hanoi Vietnam, July, 2007**



**Mr. Yaser Raza Khan, Honorable Mention holder of first Pakistani team in 32<sup>nd</sup> IPhO in Turkey 2001**



**Dr Abdullah Sadiq and Dr Masood Ul Hassan with Pakistani 33<sup>rd</sup> IPhO Team in Bali Indonesia, 2002**



**Dr Abdullah Sadiq and Dr Masroor Ikram with Pakistani IPhO Team in 34<sup>rd</sup> IPhO 2003, Taiwan**



**Dr Abdullah Sadiq and Dr Masroor Ikram with Pakistani IPhO Team in 35<sup>th</sup> IPhO 2004,**



**Dr Abdullah Sadiq and Dr Kashif Sabih with Pakistani 36<sup>th</sup> IPhO, 2005, Spain**



**Dr Abdullah Sadiq and Dr Ibrahim Qazi with Pakistani IPhO Team in 37<sup>th</sup> IPhO in Singapore, 2006**



**Dr Ibrahim Qazi and Editor-in-Chief with Pakistani Team in 38<sup>th</sup> IPhO Isfahan Iran, July, 2007**



**Winners of NSTC-3 and Participants of International Science Olympiads 2007 posing with Dr Muhammad Aslam, Rector PIEAS, Dr S Mahmood Raza, Advisor HEC, Dr Abdullah Sadiq, Chair STEM Careers Project, Dr Ibrahim Qazi, NPTC Coordinator, Dr Nasim Irfan, Coordinator NPTC, Dr Khalid M Khan, Coordinator NCTC and Editor-in-Chief NAAM on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2007 at GIK-I** →

