



Students 'keen to air views'

YOUNGSTERS have opinions that the world needs to hear, say participants at this year's Bahrain Model United Nations (Bahmun) conference, the kingdom's largest secondary-school level simulation of the UN.

More than 350 students from various government and private schools in Bahrain, as well as three international schools from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are voicing their ideas at the mock UN assembly organised by the Rotary Club of Adliya.

The event, which annually educates students about the UN and other contemporary international issues, was opened yesterday at the Abdul Rahman Kanoo School, Isa Town.

The young 'diplomats' had a chance to debate and discuss several issues during the conference's first day.

For most of the students, preparations began as early as November last year.

Preparations included getting information from the Internet, libraries and staying up-to-date with the news by reading newspapers and watching updates on television.

In the children's schools, teachers involved in the project also spent time with each Bahmun participant to make sure they knew what to expect for the major event.

This year's Bahmun secretary-general is American Bill Marczak, 17, from Bahrain School.

Selected by officials out of several applicants to become secretary-general, Bill has had several opportunities in the past to observe the organisation and running of Bahmun.

"I have participated three other times in Bahmun, first as the representative of the UAE and the following year it was the Sudan and last year I was the general assembly chairman," he said.

"So far, this year's Bahmun has been going extremely well.

"I have observed different sessions and seen a lot of participation from the delegates.

"There is a lot of mixing of delegates and forming working relations as well as new friendships."

Bill said students learned very important lessons at Bahmun, including learning how to compromise.

"Bahmun is great that it helps young people to develop leadership skills.

"Another special thing about Bahmun is that with the small size of the community you get a sense of intimacy.

"The students learn the value of compromise and they know that you can't get everything 100 per cent."

Youngsters do have ways of getting heard, said Bill.

"In a way young people's opinions are not heard but there are definitely ways that we can be heard," he said.

"In Bahrain for example, we can write letters and express our opinions in the Press, such as the GDN, and this is important to know that we can get our views published."

Bill said he sees Bahmun growing in the future and continuing in helping develop leaders of tomorrow.

Japanese Satoko Kanamori, 16, is this year's general assembly chairwoman.

Like Bill, this 17-year-old Bahrain School pupil has also taken part in previous model UN events, such as the Cairo Model United Nations in Egypt and the Bahrain School's Mini-MUN, both held last year.

"Events like these give us the opportunity to think about the world and important life-changing things that are happening around us," she said.

"Young people need to be more informed and especially today I would imagine it is easier to do that because of the advancement of technology.

"It is easier to get information these days through the Internet."

Satoko's co-chairman is Ratan Dominic Rego, 16, of the Indian School.

This is Ratan's first time at the general assembly, but he says he is having an amazing experience.

"This is a wonderful forum and it helps us with our debating abilities," he said.

"There is a lot of problem solving done in front of the crowd, where our voices are heard."

Probably one of the youngest participants in this year's event is 14-year-old Scot Tasmin Greig, from the British School of Bahrain.

"It is a very educational experience for me," said Tasmin, who is representing Brazil.

"It just establishes the fact that even though I am young, I have a lot of things to say. I think that many older people think youngsters are incapable of understanding things they think are too 'grown up' such as what's happening in the world today.

"We are young but we are also eager to know what is going on and to be involved.

"When we do get the proper information, it helps us prepare ourselves for the future."

The visiting children from Saudi Arabia and the UAE are enjoying their stay in Bahrain.

For many of them, this experience is an eye-opener.

Saudis Tameem Abdulfattah and Abdulaziz Al Salih, both 16, and Hazim Mohammed Abu Libeleh, 17, are from the Dhahran Ahliya Boys' School

This is their first time at Bahmun as delegates, but they were here at last year's event as observers.

"We hope that we get something like Bahmun in Saudi Arabia," said Abdulaziz.

"Events like these teach us new skills, skills that we would be using for life."

Eleven schoolchildren from Saudi Arabia are taking part in this year's event.

Eight girls from the Dhahran Ahliya Girls' School are also taking part for the first time.

"But this won't be the last time we would be participating," said the girls' school Muna director Rula Abdul Qadi.

"Our students have been looking forward to coming to Bahrain and they've come well prepared. We're very proud of them."

The 14 children from the Abu Dhabi International School are accompanied by their Muna director Riza Blaik Aouran.

"Many of these pupils from Abu Dhabi have taken part in Bahmun before," said Ms Aouran.

"They find the experience very enlightening and it also helps build their self-confidence.

"It is vital for children to know current events and have their voices heard."

Iraqi pupil Basma Abdeljalil, 16, said events such as Bahmun not only get young people's voices heard but also help children realise that they are important members of the society.

"We are contributors in this world and what we learn now we will take with us forever," she said.

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