

family and you would take time eating and talking with one another. But now a lot of people work on Sundays and Sunday has become, for many, just like any other day of the week and family life is suffering. However, some parents are very strict about the family eating together for certain meals. You turn the television off and you talk to one another. Some parents say, "This is a home, not a hotel. You don't just sleep and eat here. We have to make time to communicate with one another."

A Bangladeshi father said to a friend of mine what many sad fathers in many countries are saying, "I have a teenage son and I have nothing to say to him and he has nothing to say to me." Family life can get like that – no communication. I hope you are saying, "I will do all I can not to let that happen to me! I am going to learn to be communicative!" How lovely it is when family members really talk together and even argue together and share their lives and show they care by being interested in one another. I will tell you tomorrow some things you can say to show you are interested in one another. Remember some of the things that happen during the day in school and share these stories with your parents when you go home so that they know what you have been doing all day, in school, because you are communicating. God bless you.



## REJECTING 'BAD CULTURE'

*Assembly 75 - May 26<sup>th</sup> 2003*

Let us think of the way in which the slogan on this poster "None of us is as smart as all of us" applies to men and women, boys and girls, working well together and treating each other as of equal value and status. In all countries, developed and developing, there are men and boys who behave very badly to women and girls, but

it is a major problem in many of the poorer countries. As you may imagine, I have been very shocked to read of the abuses of the human rights of women and girls in Bangladesh. I want this school to do all it can to help both boys and girls to be informed, aware and thinking about this matter. Of course, you must respect all that is good and true and noble in your own culture, but also have the courage to ask some major questions about some cultural practices here that hurt women. In every culture, people must ask, "What is good in my culture that I shall choose to practice? And what is bad in my culture that I shall choose not to practice?" There are good and bad things in my British culture also that I have had to think about in my life.

Millions of Muslims live in the UK and recently, the police have said they are very worried that the number of honour killings is rising. That is, Muslim women are being killed by their fathers, brothers and other male members of their family who say they have brought shame on the family and must die. On a BBC Worldservice programme last Friday, the British Muslim man who is head of the Islamist Centre in the UK was asked by the interviewer what he thought about this. He said that honour killings were very wrong. "This is nothing to do with the teaching of the Prophet," he said, "This is a bad part of our culture and it must stop. In my mosque, I speak out in my sermon (*upodesh*) and tell my people so."

In the same way, good people are needed to speak out against the dowry system - you understand 'dowry'? Again it is cultural and not religious. If you take the Daily Star, look at Friday's copy and read about a young Indian student, Nisha Sharma, whose wedding (*biye*) was about to take place and suddenly her future husband, Munish Dalal, and his family demanded dowry of over a million rupees. At first she was afraid but then she was angry, very angry. How can you begin a good marriage if the people you are going to live with do not see you as a person but only as a purse - a moneybag? She had had enough of this way of men

bullying women so she called the police, her bridegroom was arrested and he is now in prison. There is a law against asking for dowry in India - as there is in Bangladesh - but usually no one uses it. She used it. All her family and friends are supporting her. Visiting her home are Members of Parliament, human rights activists and Bollywood film stars who have all said, "Well done, Nisha!" She has become a heroine. A lot of young women are copying her. They are losing their fear and getting angry with these greedy young men and their families. Dowry is a kind of terrorism and a group called the Anti-Terrorist Front have given her a prize for having the courage to fight the dowry system. Now many men want to marry her but she says that, for now, she will continue with her studies.

Those against dowry in India estimate that one woman dies every 10 minutes because of the dowry system. They are burnt to death because their husbands and their families think a new wife should bring them a lot of money and are angry if she doesn't. One woman dying every 10 minutes is a lot of suffering and the practice will continue among the poor, unless the more educated and enlightened women and their families use the law to set an example for everyone.

One day, you too, both girls and boys, will have to decide whether to participate in this dowry business and thus ignore the laws of your country and ignore your best religious teachers - or whether you too, like Nisha, and more and more people, will see it as an evil part of your culture and fight it courageously, setting an example to all. Whatever you do, may God bless you.



## CABINET MEETINGS

*Assembly 76 – May 27<sup>th</sup> 2003*

My country, the UK, is rightly famous for having developed a way of government called 'parliamentary democracy'. This is the sort of government that Bangladesh is trying to have also, but it is very difficult to get right and all of us have to work hard to make it work properly. You can have a government like this with a king or queen, like the UK, or without a king or queen, like Bangladesh.

In this sort of government, the Prime Minister chooses a special group of people called a Cabinet. These are the people who run various departments called ministries – like Minister of Health and Minister of Education and Minister of Commerce and so forth. It is in this group, the Cabinet, where a lot of the big decisions are made, although it should always be Parliament where the big decisions are agreed upon.

In the government of your life and mine, we too have a kind of Cabinet – and, for each one of us, our Real Self is the Prime Minister that has to keep them all in order and in balance. Each one represents important and different parts of our lives that we are responsible for and we should try and keep them in balance. If you like, you can think of them as your Ministers, sitting round a table in the Cabinet Office of your life and you have to listen to them all and judge between them because they all want their own way. You have your Minister for Health. We are all attached to bodies that have to be cared for. Our bodies need proper sleep and food and exercise. If things go wrong, everything else in our lives can stop working properly. It is right that we listen to what our bodies are telling us but we have to be careful because, sometimes, our bodies want to sit down and do nothing – except eating or sleeping. We also have a Minister for Schooling. It is