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Pen International Writers Conference

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THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

1. The first Asian conference of the Pen International Writers concluded successfully last week in Dacca. Altogether, some 50 delegates and observers, representing East and West Pakistan and 10 foreign countries, participated in the three-day (Feb. 24-26) conference, which had "Religion and Literature" as its main theme and "The Literary Scene" in each country as the subject of primary interest.
2. The conference was opened by His Excellency the Governor of East Bengal; Dr. Mahmud Husain, former Education Minister of Pakistan; Dr. W. A. Jenkins, Vice-Chancellor of Dacca University; and Dr. Md. Shahidullah, President of East Pakistan Pen also made opening speeches.
3. Principal foreign participants were: David Carver, British, International Secretary of Pen; Malcolm Muggeridge, British, Editor of Punch; Jean de Beer, secretary-general of the French Pen; Richard Taplinger, member of the Executive Board of New York Pen; Dr. Ho Yung Chi, president, Singapore Pen; Jun Takami, and Michio Takeyama, Tokyo Pen; Naba Kishore Das, Indian Pen; Joseph Chu, Korean Pen (not yet officially recognized); Maria Yen, Hongkong, who is now organizing a Free Chinese Pen center in Hongkong; Juan C. Tuvera, Philippine Writers Association; Sukit Nimmanhaeminda and Nilawan Pinthong, Thailand; seven delegates from West Pakistan Pen.
4. A book exhibition held in connection with the conference was quite successful. Largest exhibits were by USIA, British Council, Dacca University (rare books), "American Publishers" (250 volumes collected by Franklin publishers), Orient Longman's Council of the Mosque, and Pen (publications from several centers) -- probably 2,000 volumes in all. Since the exhibit was arranged in a Dacca University hall, the largest number of visitors came from among the ranks of the students.
5. The conference went off quite smoothly, in spite of some jealous grumbling by non-Pen writers and leftists, and in spite of the excitement and tension caused by the February 21st arrest of 219 University Students for their over-enthusiastic celebration of Martyr's Day. The only immediate effect of this incident on the conference was the cancellation of a Bengali folk opera planned for the delegates (because some of the student cast were thrown in jail for participating in the student demonstrations!) and the cancellation of most of the delegates' planned student lectures. Only the Editor of Punch was allowed to speak to the students and, needless to say, he carried it off very well. 20 MAY 1955

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6. Miss Yen, a recent convert to Catholicism, spent much time among the local Catholics, and was tremendously successful in informal conversation with students and young writers, many of them leftists. She also spoke to some 50 women of the Begum club, (sponsored by Begum magazine for women), as did the Thai woman editor, Miss Pinthong. Jean de Beer later addressed Pen members in Lahore and Karachi.
7. Parties for the delegates included a reception at Government House, one by East Pakistan Pen, one by the Urdu writers' association, one by the Press Club, one by the Editor's Association, one by the Chairman of Dacca Municipality, and one by Dacca University student volunteers whose devoted efforts were largely responsible for the success of the conference.
8. The "Religion and Literature" papers did not produce anything substantial, except that Taplinger's report on Religious Book Publishing in the USA opened many eyes to American activities and interests in this field.
9. Great interest was expressed in all the papers dealing with the literary situation in the Asian countries represented, especially on the part of the western delegates present.
10. The delegates and observers passed a resolution, for submission to the April Executive Council meeting of the International Pen, requesting the opening of Pen centers in all Asian countries where they do not now exist, and requesting that the World Congress of Pen be held in Asia (for the first time) in 1956. Singapore Pen's president will personally present an invitation to the Congress at this April meeting.
11. The conference appears to have laid the foundation for expansion of Pen centers in Asia, and for an increased appreciation of Asian literary efforts in the West; this was primary objective which seems to have been successfully achieved.
12. Conflicts between Pen centers in East and West Pakistan, and between Pen and non-Pen writers in East Pakistan, were brought into clear focus as a result of the conference. A series of meetings in Karachi after the conference seem to have resolved most of the differences so East Pakistan has agreed not to submit to International Pen a request for separate recognition.
13. As a result of the conference, a number of non-Pen writers of East Pakistan have already been enrolled as members and other desirable writers will be taken in gradually to broaden the base of Pen here.
14. A brief appraisal of the Asian delegates follows:
 - a. Maria Yen, Hong Kong -- easily the most effective, most influential, and most admired person at the conference, by delegates, observers, students, and others who met her.
 - b. Joseph Chu, Korea -- the most gregarious, sympathetic, and interested person; the one who made the most contacts; deeply appreciated for his sincere appreciation of all he saw and all the Pakistanis did to acquaint him with their country.
 - c. Dr. Ho Yung Chi, Singapore -- friendly, erudite, well-liked particularly among the educators present and among the delegates themselves.

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- d. Juan Tuvera, Philippines -- quiet, apparently too humble among the older writers, but extremely well-liked by the younger writers and students with whom he came in contact.
 - e. Pinthong and Nimmanhaeminda, Thailand -- not as sociable as the others, hence not as much reaction, but very pleasant and friendly.
 - f. Takami and Takeyama, Japan -- the former read one of the best papers at the conference, but the Japanese consul was so solicitous of these delegates that he monopolized them with the result that they had too little contact with the delegates, and virtually none with the people in general.
 - g. Muggeridge and Carver -- the former kept the conference in a jovial mood, was considered by most as the star of the conference; this in spite of the fact that he made some unnecessarily unkind cuts for the sake of a gag. Carver is the prototype of the Sartorial Colonial; except for the official blessings his presence bestowed upon the conference, he would not have been missed.
15. Ideologically, the conference produced no heat and little light, largely because of the presence of substantially like-minded delegates. A last-minute decision of some strongly leftist Indian delegates to stay away from the conference eliminated the probability of controversy. Thus there was not even a trace of the pro-Communist tone which prevailed in the Curzon Hall literary conference of ten months ago. The present conference was partly motivated by a desire to offset the damage done by last year's conference which, ironically, was presided over by the same man who presided over this one, Dr. Md. Shahidullah.

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