Selina Ahmed, a professor at Texas Southern University, is deeply involved in working for peace and justice — especially for women and children — around the world.

By CECILE HOLMES WHITE
Houston Chronicle Religion Editor

"CALL me Warren Moon," Selina Ahmed's son begged long before the gifted Houston quarterback almost made it to the Super Bowl.

Mehran D. Ahmed, then 7, was tired of being teased about his Muslim name. After an adult neighbor urged other children to call him "Saddam Hussein," the child couldn't stand it any longer. A sports fanatic, he wanted to change his name to "Warren Moon," the most all-American moniker he could think of. Like millions who are hurt by ethnic, racial and religious prejudice, Mehran wanted to belong. For his mother, it proved how much work she has left to do.

Teacher, speaker, human rights advocate, liaison between religions and cultures, Selina Ahmed, 47, wants to fight stereotypes and secure justice. She is representative of a new generation of younger female immigrants to the United States. Now equipped with education and growing clout, women like her slowly are beginning to wield influence.

"She has managed to find her place and her niche in the community of Houston. She is well-organized, devoted to what she does. What made us very appreciative of her is that she follows up on what she wants to do," said Nabila Drooby, executive director of The Rothko Chapel in Houston. "She has a professional," said Muhammad Badr, the society's president. "She has made a good contribution," he said.

Though she is deeply committed to political justice, personal freedom and Islam, Ahmed's associations transcend traditional religious and political boundaries. Last year she joined a team of Muslims from Houston who visited Croatia to help Muslim refugees there. A couple of years ago she spoke out against atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina at a local interfaith news conference. She later worked with other women in organizing a local rally to call public attention to women's plight in that war-torn region.

Ahmed shrugs if pressed to explain why she feels such a gargantuan sense of responsibility. Someone has to care. Someone has to speak out. Someone has to build the human coalitions, she says. The politicians and negotiators don't seem to move fast enough, she said. Other private citizens speak out. They accept the inherent risks. Why shouldn't she?

"I have found her an extremely competent woman to express her faith tradition, which is in a minority position in Houston and in the United States, to the rest of us who have not thought until now beyond Jewish and Christian perspectives," said Garland Pohl, ecumenical officer of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Houston.

Selina Ahmed, a professor at Texas Southern University, is deeply involved in working for peace and justice — especially for women and children — around the world.

"I have been trying to face my conscience that, as a citizen of the United States, what am I doing? Am I doing enough to help the people of this universe?"
Human rights advocate Selina Ahmed is beginning to wield influence as she juggles her time as a teacher, speaker and liaison between religions and cultures. In addition, she’s a wife and mother of three children. Here, she assists her 11-year-old son, Mehran, at the piano.

“I can’t believe that we are listening, we are watching and absorbing all these unfortunate, ill-fated people’s horrible experiences in life,” Ahmed said. She recalls her response after listening to one horrible story after another in Vienna. “I felt so small, so limited when I was surrounded by hundreds of people in the refugee camp outside of Vienna and given the look of hope from them,” she said. “They were thinking that I was from the United States, and I’d go back and tell their situation. So maybe they’d be able to be rescued, to be helped.”

Peacemakers needed
Her voice is tight with frustration. The encounter forced her, she said, to see if her life reflected her beliefs. The mother of two daughters, Leana, 18, and Nilia, 14, and her son, Mehran, 11, Ahmed is married to a CPA, Dewan A. Ahmed. She still has family in Bangladesh. But her life here is comfortable, even a little affluent.

“So I’ve been confronting myself,” she said. “I have been trying to face my conscience that, as a citizen of the United States, what am I doing? Am I doing enough to help the people of this universe? I’m not a politician.”

Prayer, study, living out the tenets of Islam, corresponding with people worldwide and reflection have convinced her that while politicians remain the world’s decision-makers, they cannot be its peacemakers.

“Peace needs to be brought about by people like you and me,” she said. “People who will try to understand each other’s values. In order to do that, we have to go through an educational process and that education is going to come from understanding people through their education, their culture, their religion.”

To Ahmed, Bosnia is a prime example. “The people in the United States, they have the power,” she said. “We need the power of education. If we educate one of the people, we educate the whole world.”

Continued from Page 1E.
WELCOME VOLUNTEERS

'98 JIMMY CARTER WORK PROJECT
BUILDING HOMES & HOPE
HOUSTON, TEXAS
Dr. Selina Ahmed  
Mickey Leland Center on  
World Hunger and Peace  
Texas Southern University  
3100 Cleburne Avenue  
Houston, Texas  77004  

Dear Selina:

Thank you for your letter regarding youth and violence. I appreciate your thoughtful comments.

I agree that as our country moves toward the challenges of the new century, we must emphasize the values of respect, responsibility, and non-violence in the school systems of our nation. My Administration is dedicated to promoting character education and helping to teach our young people the importance of good citizenship.

As we work toward a more peaceful future, I look forward to your continued involvement.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Fiesta's Manager With A Vision, Dexter Hoskins

The Man Behind The Badge, Victor Trevino

Why We Won't Talk To You . . .

My Son's Birth

Want Healthy Kids? Teach Them To Cook

From Bangladesh To The Future

Selina Ahmed speaks out for human rights!
Angered into ACTION

Use of rape as a war tactic in the Bosnian conflict has prompted Muslim women to unite in rare public protest.

“For Muslim women, virginty is divine, incredibly precious,” says Dr. Selina Ahmed,belt, professor of nutrition at Texas Southern University. “Once it is lost, an unmarried woman will not be accepted. A married woman who is raped may not be accepted by her husband.”

By LESLIE SOWERS
Houston Chronicle

I t is the spring of 1991 in Gorazde, Bosnia. It is 10 p.m. A Muslim mother is huddled with 16 other women in her apartment, the room lit only by a candle. Their husbands are defending the town against Serbian forces, leaving them alone with the children.

Enemy men in camouflage uniforms and ski masks enter the flat. They strip the mother, force her to perform sexual acts and injure her. Before losing consciousness, she hears them raping another woman. She also hears them curse all Muslim mothers: “You sent your husbands to fight, but you will see. We will do to you everything we know and then take you to the concentration camp.”

These harrowing moments are taken from Testimony SIR 429 given to the Ministry of Health in Croatia about six months after the rape occurred.

Thousands of Muslim women have reported experiencing similarly inhuman treatment, and their pain has touched people throughout the world. It is moving Muslim women in Houston to take a more active role than they may have ever taken in their lives as they protest the conditions of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

Dr. Selina Ahmed, a professor of nutrition at Texas Southern University, is one of them. A U.S. citizen originally from Bangladesh, she went with other Muslims from the Islamic Society of Greater Houston to Croatia in April, hoping to help Muslim refugees. She visited refugee camps and called on local government officials to assist in their task. She met with refugees and listened to their stories of rape and mistreatment.

She talked to rape victims and visited government shelters filled with the offspring of those rapes, babies abandoned by mothers unwilling to raise them. Her group tried to bring the victims back to the United States for adoption, but the Croatian government was-holder in hope that their mothers will eventually reclaim them.

Ahmed returned with pages of the women’s testimony, which she flies in shopping bags on the floor of her cluttered office.

A United Nations team of experts investigating rapes that have taken place in the war in the former Yugoslavia has found evidence that rape

See MUSLIMS on Page 6D.
The Astronauts’ Nutritionist

Tale of a scientist who keeps space travelers healthy

Our mysterious universe filled with heavenly bodies has never failed to amaze humans in any civilization. The invention of the telescope helped humans begin to understand the visible universe. In recent times, we have been exploring space—the final frontier—not only by launching satellites to the edge of the solar system, but also by building marvelous structures that orbit around our beautifully blue mother earth. Astronauts can live in these space stations for prolonged durations in order to better observe the bewildering universe. These spectacular human achievements have been made possible by sheer commitment and perseverance of countless people down on earth. Flip to the next page for the inside scoop of one such unsung hero, or heroine, to be precise (shown towards the center of the archived photo below, along with her esteemed colleagues).
Have these questions ever crossed your mind...?

What do astronauts eat? Can astronauts enjoy in space the culinary delights from around the world? How much food and drink are needed for five astronauts on a 7-day mission? For a space team that includes astronauts from different parts of the world—for example, France and Japan—is it practical to take different types of ethnic meals to make them feel at home, away from home?

Clearly these are out-of-the-world questions, and they can evoke intrigue with a dash of curiosity among kids and adults alike. Yet the answers are not quite straightforward due to the complexity of living in a compact habitat under zero gravity. Fortunately, providing answers to such diet-related questions is the forte of a special breed of scientists. Their mission is to help astronauts lead a healthy space life in two ways: (1) by maintaining sound physical conditions through nutritional balance, and (2) by avoiding weight gain that could be caused by over-consumption.

Recently we had an opportunity to meet with one such scientist, Dr. Selina Ahmed, whose passion for this behind-the-scene mission has made her successful in her chosen field. The worldwide community of astronauts benefits from dietary guidelines and nutritional requirements formulated by Selina Ahmed.

Selina Ahmed hails from a little green country known as Bangladesh, where she was born in a place called Noakhali. Now a US citizen, she lives in the city of Houston in the state of Texas. Known as a ‘Space Nutritionist’ among astronauts and space scientists, she is a well-known figure in the Houston community. This past August 2nd in the lobby of Houston’s Crown Plaza Hotel, she took time off her busy schedule to share some tidbits of her life.

Her distinctive charm that radiates as she talks and acts makes an unforgettable first impression. To anyone familiar with Bengali culture, the grace and warmth that she exudes would instantly be recognized as those pristine qualities instilled by a culture polished over centuries. Clearly she has been treasuring her roots even after living in USA for over forty years. Like many expatriates, she cherishes an ardent desire to visit her homeland, and, most amazingly, she has been actually doing so regularly, with her most recent visit being last December. Unfortunately, the physical condition of her husband, Mr. Dewan Ahmed, has recently cast some uncertainty about her future visits.
Back to her professional matters, Selina Ahmed pointed out two primary factors in creating dietary guidelines for astronauts: (1) minimize the volume of food, so it does not require much storage in the limited space of a space habitat, and (2) ensure a balanced presence of nutritionally rich elements even in the small food volume. This is why astronaut foods are generally dry and compact as a result of extracting all liquid content and even moisture.

Selina Ahmed reminded us that astronauts in space are usually living and working in a tiny area that does not allow them to move around much. Lack of maneuverability tends to cause muscle inertia and fatigue. And so their food must have supplemental ingredients for muscular agility. As an anecdote, she noted that the concept behind Tang, a commercial orange-color energy drink-mix with powder electrolytes, originated from the science of astronaut meals.

Her explanation made everything appear so easy, yet in reality her job requires special expertise and experience that can take years to acquire. For a long time she and two associates have been diligently working with diverse cuisines from multiple continents. In addition to USA and Canada, the extensive list of countries includes Sweden, West Germany, Italy, Poland, former Soviet Union, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan, Philippines, and Thailand. It can get quite intensive if you consider that she conducted research on freezing and packaging of 38 different foods from former Soviet Union alone!

When Soviet Union came up during the conversation, Selina Ahmed shared something quite fascinating. She visited Soviet Union with a research grant from NASA. Since it was during the heights of political tension with USA, both countries were cautious about sharing information. Still she had a thrilling experience collaborating with Soviet space scientists. She said: “At that time I saw many ambitious plans cherished by Soviet scientists. But they couldn’t realize those plans due to inadequate funding.” She also stated that when she started this precarious research project with the then cold war adversary of USA, she was told by NASA: “You could bring about world peace with research on food!”

On the second day of our interview, standing in front of NASA Space Center in Houston, Selina Ahmed tapped into her wisdom: “Success does not happen overnight. It results from a relentless diet of endeavor and perseverance, with a healthy dose of inspiration.” She had received such inspiration from her husband as well as many teachers that included Mrs. Siddika Kabir from Dhaka Home Economics College where she had studied decades earlier.

It was towards the end of 1970 when Selina Ahmed came to USA after completing the M.Sc. degree at Dhaka University. She said in a nostalgic tone: “At that time Dhaka University had a higher educational standard. With a degree from there, I was able to start my Ph.D. in USA without any extra coursework.” She completed her Ph.D. at the age of 27. Even before she completed her Ph.D., she landed a job as a Clinical Dietician at the Methodist Hospital of Houston.
Selina Ahmed’s formal education trajectory began in Bangladesh at Ahammodia High School of Sonapur in Noakhali. Later she moved on to Miazdee Gov’t School, followed by Uma Girl’s High School, and finally Dhaka Home Economics College. She earned her Honors degree in 1966 from the Home Economics College under Dhaka University, and her Masters degree in 1968. A few years later, in 1973, the trajectory reached its zenith when she earned her much aspired Ph.D. in Nutrition from Texas Woman’s University in Denton, near Dallas, Texas.

As to her career trajectory, it began when she took her first job in 1968 as a Nutrition Instructor at Dhaka Holy Family Hospital in Bangladesh. For about past four decades, she has been a professor at Texas Southern University in Houston. There, for several years, she also held a director position at the Mickey Leland Center on World Hunger and Peace. Texas Southern University has conferred upon her the National Achievement Award. She is a member of many professional organizations. She has been accepted as a fellow at the American Leadership Forum. Her work took her across many borders, including that of Russia, Italy, Spain, Japan, China, Austria, Greece, etc. Currently she is also working on solving nutrition-related issues for people who are less fortunate.

When asked about the source of her inner strength, she quickly referred to her family as the fountain. She is proud to have never let professional ambitions compromise family obligations. Along with her husband, who is a CPA, she raised their three children to be equally driven. Married to US citizens, her two daughters are accomplished professionals: elder Leana Ahmed, an Electrical Engineer; younger Naila Ahmed, a Chemical Engineer. Her only son, Mehran Dewan Ahmed, is currently studying at a university in the state of Colorado.

One memorable yet gruesome experience outside of her life as usual goes back to a November 1978 flight en route from USA to her birth land. She vividly recalled the nightmare of being one of 276 passengers of that British Airways flight taken over by a few hijackers claiming to be supporters of PLO!

Currently Selina Ahmed is involved in multiple charity initiatives, which provide her with immense joy and personal fulfillment. She also has a keen interest in improving the lives of cancer patients. To that end, she is a visiting scientist at Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, specifically the Center for Research on Minority Health (CRMH), with a focus on South Asian descendents.

THE END

Introduction and translation by: Kallol Halder (email: Kallol.Halder@gmail.com)  September 21, 2011
October 2, 1989

Selina Meena Ahmed
10010 Kirkaspen
Houston, Texas  77089

Dear Selina:

Please excuse the delay in replying to your letter about the project "New Initiatives for New Americans." I endorse your objective to contact and organize people from different ethnic backgrounds and urge them to join the Democratic Party. I believe your efforts should be coordinated from the Party Office as a new task force committee of the local Party, similar to the Hispanic Task Force which has recently been formed, and would urge you to keep me informed of members of the committee and the efforts that you plan to undertake in an effort to build a broader constituency for the Party.

If I or the office can be of any help in this effort, please let me know.

Sincerely,

John F. Carter, II
Chair

JFC:met/452/2
CC: Jane W. Elioseff
    7303 Brompton, Apt. 325B
    Houston, Texas  77025
MEET ONE OF OUR OWN

Dr. SELINA AHMED

Dr. Selina Ahmed came to the United States in early seventies and is one of the early pioneers of Bangladeshi in Houston. Dr. Ahmed, more widely known as "Mina Apa", came here when the Bangladeshi community in Houston was less than ten. She obtained her Bachelors and Masters degree in Home Economics from the Dhaka University. Immediately after her graduation she worked as Nutrition Instructor for the Nursing School of the Holy Family Hospital in Dhaka and devoted part of her time as a volunteer Nutrition Instructor for the Rural Health Center at the Agricultural Development State near Dhaka.

Upon arrival in the United States in 1971, Dr. Ahmed went on to attend Texas Women’s University in Denton in pursuit of her research in Human Nutrition and was conferred a Doctor of Philosophy in 1973. In June of the same year, she joined the Methodist Hospital as Administrative and Clinical Dietician. In August, 1975, she became a member of the teaching staff in the Department of Home Economics at Texas Southern University in Houston.

Dr. Ahmed says, "The United States is the only country in this whole universe that offers the opportunity - if you have strong motivation and self assertiveness - you can be somebody here." Dr. Ahmed's dream continues to become reality as she pursues her work as a professor of Home Economics specializing in Nutrition research.

Dr. Ahmed has a strong relationship with NASA, which began in 1971, working with the NASA Skylab program as a Ph.D student, and then, in 1980, as a research fellow under NASA-ASEE Summer Faculty Fellowship Program. Those research programs included development and evaluation of controlled ecological life support systems and an evaluation of the space feeding concept from early missions to the present. She has worked closely with NASA nutritionists on projects which included sending Dr. Ahmed’s high tech version of frozen dinner that is ready to heat in a microwave. With high tech version of the frozen dinner, astronauts enjoy a variety of ethnic foods that are appealing to the palette as well as in appearance and aroma. These meals varying in international cuisine of French, Russian, Turkish, Japanese and Indian (or is it Bangladeshi?), have come a long way from the bland space-food of early missions.

Dr. Ahmed is in great demand in the international arena. She traveled to the USSR in 1980, when she was invited by the Institute of Biomedical Problems to visit Moscow, Leningrad, and Taskent. During her visit she was exposed to the Soviet Space Nutrition Program. In the process of her work in developing food for the astronauts, she traveled to distant lands such as Spain, Japan, and Italy.

Another important part of Dr. Selina Ahmed’s life is her strong religious belief in the sacredness of life. She, as the public relations coordinator for the Islamic Society of Greater Houston, believes that "religion is a tool - a source of interfaith dialogue. Religion should serve as a center of information. It should help us to understand each other - not hate each other."

However, Selina Ahmed is not the one to sit back and merely talk about ways to solve the problems of the world. Her strong religious and humanistic beliefs have led her to visit Bosnia last spring to witness the atrocities there. She spent time with men, women, and children to inform them on nutrition, with emphasis on living in an extreme environment. During her stay in Bosnia she was confronted with the pain of war through wounded civilians and soldiers. The atrocity that deeply...
affected her was the blatant mistreatment of Muslim women. She works as an advocate for the rights of women in such hostile settings who are faced with rape and abuse, specifically for those in Bosnia. Rape for a Muslim woman may mean being rejected by her own people, even by her own husband. Dr. Ahmed recently spoke about her time in Bosnia at the United Nations Human Rights Conference in Vienna. Individuals from nearly 200 nations came together to address the issues concerning women involved in the Bosnian conflict. Dr. Ahmed’s primary reason for attending the conference was to defend the rights of Bosnian rape victims as well as the children who, conceived in an act of violence, have been born unwanted.

The image of Dr. Selina Ahmed as Mina Apa and as the ‘Super Mom’ may not be quite evident to many who are not acquainted with her family and other activities for the local Bangladeshi community. Mina Apa has worked long, relentless hours any time the Bangladeshi community has requested her services. She is always available to help — in good times and in bad times. She is there to help families during their needs to organize for marriage, birthday or simply to help during sickness in the family. Dewan Aftab Ahmed, her husband and a CPA by profession, was the first president of the Bangladeshi Students Association of the University of Houston formed in 1971, the very first Bangladeshi organization in Houston. Mina Apa is blessed with three children. Liana, the oldest, attends the Texas A & M University wanting to be an engineer. Her second daughter, Naila, is in 9th grade and son, Mehran, is in 6th grade. All her children are active in literary, cultural or athletic events. The Super Mom even in her busy schedule has been able to provide support, encouragement, and time for her children’s activities, leaving rest of us to wonder if her days have more hours than 24 that rest of us left to deal with.

Although Selina Ahmed’s life has led her many miles from her birthplace of Bangladesh, more astounding is the rich growth that continues to take place in her scientific endeavors and personal beliefs. Dr. Ahmed continues working in the Islamic community, speaking out on the importance of people and their equality, while also continuing to work to bring better nutrition to our astronauts. Her dreams of the future include accompanying her astronaut friends in order to perform her experiments in space. And, if this dream is like so many others in the fabric of Dr. Ahmed’s existence - it’s sure to come true.

(Courtesy of volume 1 issue #1993 of EXTRA Magazine published October 1, 1993.)
Women hurdle obstacles to reach forum

International gathering to focus on dire issues

By MELISSA FLETCHER STOELTJE
Houston Chronicle

For Selina Ahmed, nutrition professor at Texas Southern University and outspoken activist on Muslim women's issues, traveling halfway around the world to China for the NGO Forum on Women '95 is something she simply has to do.

No less than the fate of the world hangs in the balance, she believes.

"I want to raise awareness that when women suffer, the whole world suffers," said Ahmed, who leaves Houston on Wednesday to participate in a forum panel on refugee women. "If we can protect women and their rights in all respects, then we will have more peace in the whole world."

She joins 36,000 participants — most of them women — who will descend this week on a Chinese farming town 35 miles north of Beijing to take part in the largest international gathering of women in history.

To get to Huairou (pronounced why-roh; population 100,000), they will have overcome visa hassles, hotel booking snafus, an 11th-hour site change and piles of Chinese red tape.

It's estimated that hundreds of women, weary of tangling with an intractable Chinese bureaucracy, gave up their quest to reach Huairou.

The thousands who do show up Wednesday for the 10-day forum of nongovernmental organizations — usually referred to as nonprofit or community organizations in the United States — will share ideas and strategies for advancing the cause of women into the next millennium and celebrate what already has been accom-

See WOMEN on Page 12A.
Women

Condensed from Page 1A.

But their main goal will be to educate, unite and influence official governments and leaders at the parallel United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, taking place in Beijing Sept. 5-15. 

Confused by the large number of foreign delegations from 185 countries will debate a draft document that seeks to guarantee and broaden the rights of women into the 21st century. While not a binding treaty, it carries "moral weight" among nations and sets standards for them to achieve.

The NGOs will strive to have an impact on what is literally written into the U.N.'s final document. The 12-page U.N. Platform for Action covers virtually every issue affecting women and girls, from poverty and health care to educational inequalities and violence.

NGO participants will converge in the lakeside town of Huairou for workshops, roundtable discussions, exhibits, games, posters and performances, all focused on topics relating to women's equality. Subjects will range from domestic violence and sexual harassment to the feminization of poverty and access to safe water. The forum's theme is "Saving the World Through Women's Eyes."

Though accorded no official conference status beyond observers, NGOs have begun to play an increasingly vital role at U.N. conferences, said Patricia Licuanan, chairwoman of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.

"Many people consider them the 'spokespersons for civil society,'" Licuanan said. "They are the ones who are the voices. They are the ones who do the work, who are often outside the box."

Licuanan said that NGOs can "call a meeting of experts, call a meeting of women, call a meeting of men, call a meeting of children, call a meeting of the environment."

Some fear the remote location will compromise NGOs' efforts to influence the U.N. conference, although elaborate computer links and a satellite meeting area theoretically will make the distance irrelevant. During the conference, members of the U.S. delegation will meet daily with American NGOs leaders, to update them on progress and get their views.

Whatever the impact on the U.N. process in China, sources say, the NGOs are even more important after the fact, as they will work to transform conference rhetoric into reality.

"Increasingly, what you find is that the citizens groups around the world who are holding their governments accountable for what they've agreed to do," said Timothy Wilk, alternate head of the U.N. delegation and undersecretary of state for global affaiirs. "That becomes enormously important, these women's groups all over the world who are now taking the United Nations saying 'OK, you agreed to do these things, now do it.'"

About 8,000 people from the United States will attend the NGO forum, including a handful from Houston. Groups from across the country, including American NGOs heading to China from nationwide organizations, such as the YWCA, National Organization for Women and Planned Parenthood, are expected to attend.

Meanwhile, laborers in Huairou have worked around the clock in recent weeks to construct a meeting center in a site suitable for an international gathering. Dirt fields have been paved over, karaoke bars hastily converted into meeting rooms. Hundreds of portable toilets have been imported from Hong Kong.

Bio-film under the remote location will pressure the UN conference to compromise its efforts to influence the conference, although elaborate computer links and a satellite meeting area will make the distance irrelevant. During the conference, members of the U.S. delegation will meet daily with American NGOs leaders, to update them on progress and get their views.

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Space food project has an international flavor

SPACE. IT HAS BEEN called the New Frontier. And 20 years after man first set foot on the moon, America appears ready to take bolder steps into that frontier we call space.

President George Bush, on the 20th anniversary of the U.S. lunar landing, called for a return to the moon and a trip to Mars.

Big stuff, considering the fact the U.S. space program has languished somewhat over the past 20 years. "Now we all get a chance again," said William Hufstedler, manager of JSC's Office of New Initiatives.

And of course there is the space station project that will involve space travelers from around the world. An international community of spacemen, so to speak.

But once in space, what are these folk going to eat? Will the French be satisfied with Louisiana-style gumbo? How will the Japanese make it without sushi or tempura? Surely Moslem space travelers won't want to touch pork dishes.

Those food problems are now being solved at Johnson Space Center by Selma Ahmed, Ph.D., Texas Southern University Department of Home Economics, and space food scientist. She is working under a two-year, $151,900 grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration on a space food project called "International Food Patterns for Space Food."

Because of the importance of food in space, and its critical relationship to life, the project will most likely be researched and funded for many years to come. According to Joe Atkinson, chief of NASA's Equal Opportunity Program, "This ongoing research is critical to NASA and to the international space community. Much work in international food preferences is expected to be done in the future."

The work Ahmed and her two TSU student researchers, graduate student Pauline Cornish and senior Amanda Cox, are doing will make life in space easier for space travelers who have different ethnic backgrounds — they will have access to some familiar foods.

"We are developing these different foods for the well-being of the crews," said JSC food scientist Charles T. Bourland, technical monitor of the project. "Astronauts and cosmonauts feel more comfortable with their own food."

He continued: "When French astronauts went on a mission, the Americans said the French food was not satisfactory for them. They did not like French gourmet food. In fact, one of the astronauts confided in me that the smell of the food made him sick. This brought out an awareness that there was a problem with food."

So far, Ahmed has developed and prepared 38 Russian food items for freezing and packaging. The Russian food is now being prepared for shelf-life studies. Next week, she will begin studying 25 French and Canadian food items. After that, they will cook and test Japanese and Indian subcontinent foods.

The researchers selected the countries to be studied on the basis of importance of the space travelers' nationalities. The first countries selected are European (Sweden, West Germany, Italy, Poland, U.S.S.R.), and Asian (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines and Thailand).

For the entire food development research program, the countries included are from all of the world's continents and territories. The continents are subdivided according to geographic regions such as East Africa, West Africa, Asia, etc.

The basic purpose of the research is to obtain data on ethnic foods by studying each country's dietary patterns and the foods common to their diet. It will also include complete biochemical, nutritional and microbiological analyses.

But the fun part of all this space food research is the actual tasting of the food. Yeah. Passing around several dishes and tasting a small portion of each can make for a filling lunch.

And there is ice cream, too. But it's dehydrated and kind of chewy when it gets warm. When passed around The Post's editorial office, reactions ranged from "it's not cold," to "it'll do if you are desperate," to "it's better than some candy."

Overall, the food Ahmed and her assistants are preparing is rather tasty — just like home cooking. Most of it smells good, too. The good thing about this food is that it will be frozen for heating in a microwave oven in space. No doubt astronauts will be happy to ditch some of that old dried, dehydrated stuff used in years past.

And it's just in time for America's renewed commitment to, as President Bush said, "journey into tomorrow."
Letters from Bangladesh have compassion, 'miracle'

It seems that immigrants from Bangladesh are constantly on the alert to provide aid and comfort to the people back home. This weekend, the Bangladesh Association of Houston is sponsoring events to raise money for Bangladeshis struggling to survive a devastating cyclone. At least 150,000 people are known dead. Some say the toll may hit 500,000.

The events this weekend include a concert Sunday at 7 p.m. at the Wilson Turner Auditorium, 7737 Southwest Freeway. Mayor Whitmire will present a proclamation recognizing May 25 to June 1 as Bangladesh Relief Week. A Bangladesh Relief Fund Dinner will be held at 7 p.m. Monday at Clements High School, 4200 Elkins, Sugar Land. Nikki Van Hightower, the keynote speaker, and Rockets basketball star Hakeem Olajuwon will auction off several autographed basketballs. For more information about the events, call 589-0099, 893-4949, 481-8528 or 242-4231.

For weeks after the storm, Bangladeshis in America were on pins and needles wondering what had happened to their friends and families. There was little or no communication. Then letters trickled in.

Kishwer Jahan, a graduate student in mathematics at Texas Southern University, shared a letter from her mother, Hena Halim, and her sister, Kishwer Rahman.

"Her mother wrote: 'It is a horrible, almost unbearable night. It left the country devastated. Your brother-in-law (Shafiqur Rahman) went to Chokoria (six miles from the sea, where he grows shrimp) to pay the tax. He paid $2,000 tax (on the farm) and came back home (to a temporary bungalow in Chokoria) because he had a headache. He also heard the No. 10 signal (cyclone warning) on the radio. But since he had the headache, he didn't feel like going anywhere else to take shelter.'"

"A fisherman asked Shafiqur if he heard the No. 10 warning and asked him why he was still there. Shafiqur told him he had a headache and didn't feel like walking. The fisherman told him, 'Why don't you put your head on my shoulder and we can walk like that.' They walked that way for seven miles. The storm hit while they were walking. When they reached safe ground, his bungalow was under 40 feet of water. A day and a half later, he was home."

During the storm, Kishwer Rahman prayed to God that if her husband lived, she would give all she had to help the poor. It seems God is holding her to her word.

The Rahmans live in a four-story house. She has a master's degree in general chemistry and one in organic chemistry, and he is a businessman and chemical engineer.

Their home was the only one spared within a 15-mile area. Survivors of the storm were hanging from the roof of the house, hanging from the balcony, and from the windows. They numbered from 3,500 to 4,000 men, women and children, most of whom had lost or gotten out of their clothes while swimming in the floodwaters.

Kishwer Rahman began making good on her promise to God. She gave the survivors the clothes she could find, then started cutting up curtains to cover their nakedness.

As of May 14, the Rahmans were still caring for 1,095 survivors. Shafiqur went out daily looking for more people to help. His mother, Hena Halim, sends her medical supplies and food from Dhaka to help.

That is truly a family sharing its good fortune with those less fortunate.

Mohua, the woman who was reunited with her 2-year-old son, is the cousin of Selina Ahmed, a professor of nutrition at Texas Southern University. The letter is from her mother Jahan Ara Rahman.

"While Mohua (who lives near the hardest-hit area) was swimming in neck-high water to take shelter in a safe place, she was holding her son. During the high currents, she lost her son and at the same time cut her foot very badly. She was bleeding and holding her 6-month-old daughter with the other hand. She thought she had lost her son forever. After swimming five or six miles, she and hundreds of people took shelter in a house. And in that house, Mohua heard her son crying and saw him with a strange man. She told the man that was her son. She asked him where he found him. The man told Mohua that while he was swimming, something soft touched his foot. He thought it was a fish, so he tried to catch it so he could survive on it later. But he found this little boy who was still alive, so he brought him to the shore."

Ahmed: "That's how my cousin and her son were miraculously reunited. A lot of children and parents were never reunited. I feel very, very lucky and blessed by Allah."

She said the people of Bangladesh, who are overwhelmingly Muslim, were "wondering why Allah was so angry and unfair to make them suffer this way." But when the Americans landed, they started saying "Allah was sending angels to them. Angels. We can help by attending those fund-raising events. Angels, indeed."
Proposed Interfaith Building Dedication Outline (8TH Draft)
Prior to Annual Community Dinner
5:30 - 6:15 pm

5:30 - Gathering-Registering Guest Book
   Beverages

5:50 - Opening Welcome - Rabbi Roy Walter (1 min.)
   -Michael Hatjman -Herzstein Representative (2 min.)

5:55 - Interfaith Building Dedication

   Call to Worship -The Reverend Dr. Victor D. Pentz (1 min.)
   Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church
   The blowing of the Shofars- Rabbi Mathew Michaels (1 min.)
   Congregation Emanu El

   Dedicatory Prayers of Thanksgiving (1 min ea.)
   Muslim - Dr.Selina Ahmed
   The Islamic Society of Greater Houston
   Hindu - Padmakant Khambhati -Chanting
   President, Sanatan Hindu Center
   Buddhist - Rev. K. Nanda- Chanting
   President, Texas Buddhist Council

   Building Blessing- The Reverend Andrew Eugenis (1 min.)
   Dean, Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral

   Dedicatory Litany (2 min.)
   Leader-The Reverend James C. Leach, Pastor
   Covenant Baptist Church

   Special Chimes Presentation- arrangements by Ara Carapetyan

6:10   Closing Benediction - Rabbi Shaul Osadchey (1 min.)
   Total time approx. 15 min.
Grandson of Gandhi to speak at event aiding racial harmony

By LYDIA LUM
Houston Chronicle

The more Texas Southern University professor Selina Ahmed has heard about the historically black college's 50th anniversary plans, the more she has wanted to include other ethnicities.

Because of still-simmering tensions between Asians and blacks, she and other Asian leaders in Houston are organizing events promoting peace between communities of color.

That's why they're sponsoring next week's Houston visit by Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mohandas Gandhi, the Indian spiritual and political leader.

"Who better to talk about peace than a Gandhi?" said Ahmed, a nutrition professor who has been interim director of TSU's Mickey Leland Center on World Hunger and Peace.


At 10 a.m. that day, he is scheduled to give a lecture at TSU titled, "The 21st Century Is Coming, But Where Are We Going?" More than 1,000 students from local high schools are expected to attend the event, which is free to the public.

Milby High School teacher Joyce Roberson said students in the school's Peace Club are learning how certain words can hurt others. Students perform skits to learn sensitivity to different ethnicities and people with AIDS, among others.

"We're learning better ways to treat people, so Gandhi's teachings fit right in to that," Roberson said.

After Arun Gandhi's lecture, a panel discussion on nonviolent solutions to conflicts will be held. Panelists include Kid-Care director Carol Porter, SHAPE Community Center director Deloyd Parker, and H. Joan Erlich of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

That night, Gandhi will speak at a Hyatt Regency hotel gala. The topic is, "Everything I Needed to Know, I Learned from Grandfather."

Born in Durban, South Africa, Arun Gandhi struggled with anger as a youth. Whites disliked him because he was darker than them, and blacks hated him because he was lighter than them.

In 1946, he traveled to India to live with his grandfather, and the 18-month stay taught him how to deal with conflicts nonviolently.

Arun Gandhi is founder of the Memphis, Tenn.-based M.K. Gandhi Institute for the Study of Nonviolence, which applies Mohandas Gandhi's teachings to contemporary special problems.

Interracial violence still draws headlines.

In Houston, an Asian-American grocer recently was indicted on charges of deadly conduct for allegedly shooting in the direction of a black teen-ager after a rock was thrown through the store's glass door. The youth suffered a flesh wound to the leg.

A task force has been formed to improve interracial relations in the Sunnyside community.

However, blacks and Asians should learn from each other, Ahmed said.

"If Martin Luther King can learn from Gandhi, then all Asians and blacks can take their lead," Ahmed said.

For ticket information about the Hyatt Regency gala, call Ahmed at 713-313-7370 or Mariam Issa at 713-975-6078.
Groups demand attack on malnutrition

BY CARLOS BYARS
Houston Chronicle

Malnutrition is killing millions of the world’s children and damaging others with long-term effects, say advocacy groups demanding an all-out attack on the problem.

Representatives of local, national and international organizations discussed the problem Tuesday at a press conference marking the release of the 1998 report on the state of the world’s children by the United Nations Children’s fund.

The UNICEF report attributes nearly 7 million child deaths per year to malnutrition. The report notes that malnutrition is not just a lack of food, but nutrients like iodine, iron and vitamin A, plus health services and prenatal care.

U.S. Rep. Gene Green, D-Houston, noted that as a result of malnutrition, children suffer from more than hunger. Malnutrition can lead to blindness, mental retardation, lowered immunity and other effects.

"Too many children suffer from diseases that could be avoided with proper immunization," he said.

Selina Ahmed, professor of nutrition at Texas Southern University, which was host to the meeting, said malnutrition causes more than half of all the preventable deaths of children in the world.

In the United States, she said, 11 million people and 4 million children experience malnutrition.

"It is totally unacceptable that children are allowed to go hungry," she said.

Carol Porter of Kid Care Inc., which delivers 25,000 meals to Houston children each month, said she recognizes that other areas of the world have serious problems.

But, she said, it is time for America to start feeding America’s children.

Porter called for establishment of a Meals on Wheels program, similar to Kid Care, which she said has been feeding children for 13 years without help from the federal government or other fund-raising organizations.

Among those also attending were: Michael Winters of the advocacy group Results; Randolph Delay with the Oklahoma-Texas Region of Kiwanis International; and Jim Shields of Children at Risk and Bread for the World.

Green said that the current foreign operations budget contains $650 million for child survival and disease programs.

From left, John Tsaarios Jr., executive director of the U.S. Committee for UNICEF Houston-Galveston, U.S. Rep. Gene Green and Dr. Michael Winters of advocacy group Results took part in a meeting to discuss hunger among the world’s children.