Splendour of the Rice Terraces

N the Philippines, high on the traveller's itinerary must surely be the fabled rice terraces of Banaue. Billed as one of the world's wonders and regarded as a mighty engineering feat, I was so intrigued by its ingenious construction and the magnitude of its scale, I could hardly wait to see it for myself. The opportunity finally presented itself in the form of a free and long weekend.

Because of its distance from Manila (where we were based), the coach ride took

through typically tropical countryside with its lush greenery of rich ferns, wild or chids, bananas and coconut trees. Along the route were dotted rural communities made up of wooden huts with thatched roofs and on shilts, usually with a backyard of chickens and goats running around. Gardens were more often than not lovingly tended with wild profusions of colourful bouganvillae, assorted tropical flowers and fruit trees.

The further into the countryside we



Aerial view of Banaue rice terraces

some eight hours. There are quite a few went, the higher the gradient of the road, air-conditioned coaches which ply between until we were well up in the mountains Banaue and the capital city during week- when we had our first glimps of the rice ends. The only drawback then was that terraces. What a sight to thrill your senses. one is obliged to take the return journey Miles upon miles of them seem to leap out via the same coach--which does not allow at you from the far off horizon--as far as sufficient time to truly savour the peace the eye can reach. It is said that they are and tranquillity offered by the ambience of so extensive in area that if stretched out the rice terraces. These coaches only horizontally, their distance would encircle stayed a maximum of two nights, or one is the globe's entire diameter. obliged to wait for the next week-end. Now we are deep in the high mountains. which may not always be possible. When we consider that these rice terraces However, there is an alternative mode of existed over 2,000 years ago, were carved transport back to Manila, which does not out of the mountains with very primitive provide air-conditioned comfort, but is tools, our modern engineers can surely apeconomical and operates on a daily basis- plaud the wonder of such a miracle. Can what is popularly known as the "rabbit present-day builders with their high-techbuses". They cater mainly to the residents nology equipment, huge tractors and earthof the small towns and remote villages moving machinery create something so which dot the Luzon region. We took this majestically beautiful as well as basically option as we couldn't bear to leave a place essential-the key to survival of the isolated

few days of arrival. The long drive from Manila took us It was twilight by the time we reached

of such surpassing beauty within only a mountain tribes cut off from the fertile plains by forbidding ranges?

our hotel, a three-star lodging on a ridge overlooking acres and acres of rising and falling terraces. We were tired after the long day, parts of which were along bumpy, winding roads. But our flagging spirits were revived and we felt as good as new when after dinner, we took a stroll on the hotels terrace and saw the galaxies of stars glittering with great intensity in all their pristine glory. Away from the gaudy neonlights of the city, they beckoned to us like bright lanterns against a clear, cloudless sky of velvety black. Far from the city's pollution, dust and deafening traffic bathed in the starlight of this beauteous evening, I had never felt more at peace and one with Nature and its Creator.

Happiness is to wake up in the morning after a restful, deep sleep and find yourself amid a gloriously natural environment and

What a sight to thrill your senses! Miles upon miles of the rice terraces seem to leap out at you from the far off horizon as far as the eye can reach.

to the music of chirping birds, busily making their early social rounds. Although it was summer when it is hot and humid in the cities, here it was refreshingly fresh and cool.

And what a full and activity-fun-filled day it turned out to be, contrary to the predictions of "smart", sophisticated city folk who had asked somewhat condescendingly "How will you pass your time--stuck in the boondocks with no signs of civiliza tion?"; on hearing about our travel plans.

There was an assortment of programmes offered by the hotel to suit a variety of tastes and energy level. Or you could be truly adventurous and wander off totally on your own, since we were not in jungle territory, there was no danger of getting lost in the wilds. The terraces are neatly carved out, layer upon layer. It just takes a few minutes to realize that the distance separating one from another is quite high and this makes you appreciate more than ever, the ingenuity and hard labour behind its construction. The native of this region in Luzon are mostly Igorots who seem to have moved to different ways of lives, over the centuries.

We took guided a tour as this offered a modestly ambitious itinerary for our "city legs" which were not used to such demanding heights and climbing skills. We visited an Igorot village-which was probably a

model but sufficiently authentic as to demonstrate the way of life still in existence, isolated by distance and comparatively uncorrupted by the tinsel of flashy city life. Weaving there is elevated to an artform whereby centuries of craftsmanship is blended with natural dyes and tastefully executed designs. We saw women and some older children engaged in these cottage industries and one evening they brought their wares for sale to the hotel we were staying in.

Articles for sale included such practical items as place-mats, shawls, cushion covers and household decorations--all exquisitely woven in bright, cheerful colours at prices a fraction of what is charged in the city, that very few had the gall or the heart to do any bargaining-even "for the fun of it".

Despite the invasion of a modern lifestyle brought about by roads and easier transportation, some Igorot farmers still tend their little plots of rice fields on the face of the mountains. We saw certain sections which were diligently cultivated and watched with marvel at the agility and energy of the mountain tribesmen and women. It looked to us, pampered city folk, like a very tough existence, but they appeared so healthy, hardy, "full of life".

How does one spend the long evenings when cut off form the varied entertainments which city life offers? There was not a TV set in sight, no discos, bars or any other distractions. Most whiled away the hours with evening strolls and on occasions were rewarded with the breathtaking beauty of a whole bush of flickering fireflies--something one never sees except in the countryside. What a sight to conjure up in one's store of unforgettable memories.

There were also the company of fellow travellers of likeminded dispositions-after all, in this computer age of sophisticated pleasures, there are not that many who would prefer the peace and tranquillity of unspoiled nature. We met an elderly spinster and her young nephew; the former being an animal lover who could interpret her numerous cats' cies as those of a child calling her "ma..ma". It gave her great joy telling us of their eccentricities. And in the company of equally delightful companions, we passed a few days, recharging our batteries to the full.

A former feature writer of the South China Morning Post, a leading daily of Hongkong, and of regional journals, the Orientation and Insight, the writer, a Singaporean, now lives in Dhaka with her Bangladeshi husband.



Where the Virgin Mary Appears Daily

In a Yugoslav village on the Adriatic coast, pilgrims and visionaries claim to see apparitions of the Virgin Mary daily. by Gabriel Partos.

HE village of Mediugorje, nestled the Trtla mountains near Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast, is an unlikely setting for the country's most popular tourist destination. Yet in the past nine years an

estimated 18 million people from all over the world have visited this once sleepy village to see reported apparitions of the Virigin Mary. The presence of the pil-

grims in such numbers has transformed the village and caused an unholy row within the Roman Catholic Church.

On June 24, 1981 a young villager reported having seen the Virgin Mary in a vision. Since then the apparitions, shared by six local residents. have continued almost daily. Never in the history of Christianity has the Virgin Mary been reported to have ap peared so many times and to

so many people. Vicka Ivankovic, 25, is one of the visionaries for whom life has changed. She has become something of a professional visionary with groups of visitors seeking her out in the home she shares with her parents. "I feel extremely happy and contented," she says. "And I wish to spread the happiness to ev-

erybody I meet." She now has lots of opportunities to spread her happiness. The influx of visitors in the thousands daily and up to 100,000 on feast days, has transformed the lives of Medjugorje's 2.000 residents. In the past. village folk eked out an existence by growing tobacco and vines. Now most are involved in the tourist trade.

Nowhere has the spirit of commerce taken over as in Medjugorje's main street leading up to the twin-towered St James' church - now the venue for the Virgin's reported daily apparitions. On the left side of the

street there is an unbroken succession of souvenir shops. restaurants, snack bars and tourist accommodation offices inviting tired pilgrims to part with their money. On the right, a building site is being prepared for housing on what used to be peaceful village

Faced with the temptation of the hard currency windfall Mudjugorje has created, the republic's hardline authorities have abandoned their usual anti-religious attitued. Their initial reaction was harass visionaries and their supporters. but they now prefer to collect the taxes from newly-enriched villagers.

Monsignor Pavao Zanic is the man who early on protected the visionaries and their Franciscan spiritual advisors from the authorities. His diocese of Mostar includes the village. But Monsignor Zanic has since become the most outspoken critic of the phenomenon.

"I am firmly convinced the Modjugorje events are not supernatural but a show staged by the Franciscans," he said. Their goal is to become powerful, to gain favours aroud the world and to get money,

money and more money." The Virgin Mary's first appearance came shortly after Zanic had dismissed two Franciscans in Mostar for indiscipline in 1981. According to visionaries, the Virgin deplored

Zanic's haste. The dispute between the Franciscans and the local Church hierarchy is deepscated. When the Ottoman Turks occupied the region the Franciscans alone stayed on to keep the Catholic faith alive.

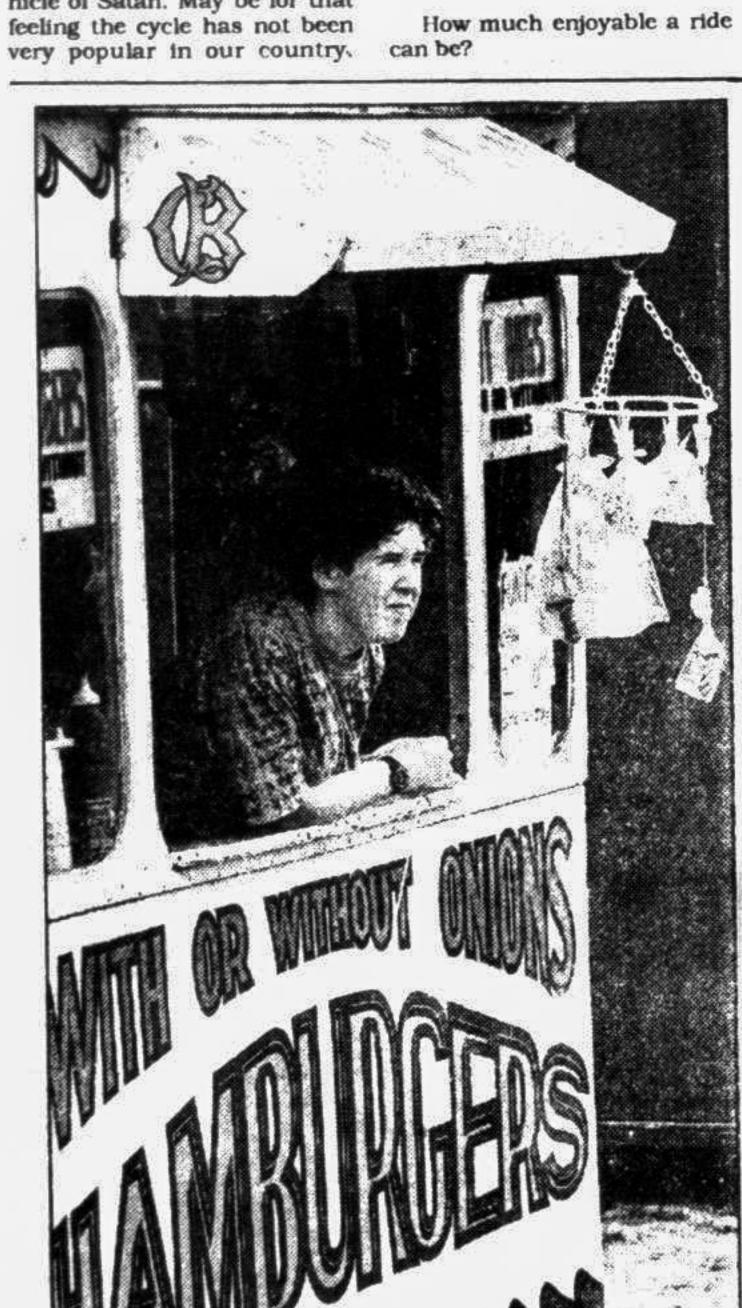
-- GEMINI NEWS

LET'S POPULARISE CYCLING AS A PASTIME — AND AN EXERCISE

by Habib Sadat Chowdhury

1 ajalu minash shaitan*- thus runs an Arabian proverb. It means-To make haste is satan's way". When bicycle was first introduced in this subcontinent a section of muslim scholars, who studied Arabic and parsian, took it to be a vehicle of Satan. May be for that feeling the cycle has not been

But cycling is still a favourite hobby of the youngapart from its being used as a means of transport by the elders. A cycle is a transport of delight. As you hope in a cycle and start moving, the feeling of cutting through the air gives you much pleasure and sensation.



Familiar flavours on the two-tone sands at Lossiemouth.

It depends on how you choose your route. One should look for a road with less traffic. At times, the purpose of taking a ride may be just to get the fresh air-for which the road beside takes and parks are very suitable. It's just like taking a walk-but enjoying more momentum.

Cycling for physical fit-

We cannot expect much. But we may realise that by making cycling a daily habit, one can find a pleasent way of burning calories. Moreover, if it could be practised early in the morning, the results may be astonishingly in favour of good health.

Cycling around in the neighbourhood can be anyone's hobby. A hobby is the work one enjoys to do in one's leisure period and one should not be pre-occupied with it. The amatuer cyclists may form

PURBECK

A secret

British isle

f one wants to show a for-

eigner England," wrote

EM Forster, "perhaps the

wisest course would be to take

him to the final section of the

Purbeck Hills and stand him

on their summit, a few miles

bridleway along the crest of a

wave, to Nine Barrow Down,

resting place of Bronze Age

warrior kings. The scene be-

low was like a famous Five

book jacket, a lost world of

meadows, ancient copses and

small fields bordered by bushy

hedgerows. The silence was

broken only by skylarks and

the tannoyed names of

showjumpers and their

mounts, broadcast from a far-

away gymkhana and blown for

sive waters of Poole Harbour,

flecked with hundreds of

dinghy sails and edged on the

Purbeck shore by saltmarshes

and veinous creeks. A few de-

grees to the east were acres of

purple heatherlands and the

marram grass-capped dunes

To the north lay the expan-

miles on the breeze.

I took myself, following the

to the east of Corfe."

a group of two or more to keep the hobby growing and strengthen friendship among them. They should come forward to establish clubs to look after the needs of amatuer cy-

As a sport, cycling is growing faster than many other sports. Bangladesh Cycling Federation provides training facilities, organises races and looks after the need of the professionals.

In Beijing, the capital of the people's Republic of China more than seven million cycles ply everyday on the roads. The Chinese have very successfully used this modern invention of the English. In Dhaka, the number of bycycles playing everyday could hardly cross seven hundred.

In Europe, the fine weather of June brings with it the annual rendissance of this transport of delight. Cycles are dislodged from their winter

and beaches of the South

Haven peninsula. Then came

Swanage, encroaching deeper

into the valley than Forster's

memory, while to the west,

the towering Norman ruins of Corfe Castle stood like a bri-

gadier's dream on a steep

grassy plug of land in a narrow

break in the hills -- "Corfe" is

wooden cafe on Studland's

beach -- the best for bucket-

and-spaders -- the chalk face

of the Isle of Wight stands out

to sea like a white galleon. The

Needles are the cousins of

Studland's Old Harry and his

now much stunted wife,

stances conspire to make

Dorset's Purbeck coastline

one of the ugliest in Britain.

The Army is on one flank, ma-

noeuvring tanks and blistering

the hillsides with shells. The

Bournemouth-Poole conurbar-

tion, one of the fastest growing

in Europe, lies just across a

narrow neck of water. The

landscape is pockmarked with

quarries sources of Purbeck

stone, the Lego for most of

Britain's cathedrals, as well as

the ball clays which are likely

to have found their way, via

Staffordshire, to your very own

lavatory. Purbeck even has oil

All manner of circum-

castoffs from the cliffs.

From the terrace of a

old Dorset for "gap".

hibernation in garages and garden sheds. In Britain, a great cycle

carnival is arranged every year. Moreover, cycle-tours are organised to boost the popularity of cycling. One of them is the famous 1,000 miles ride from Le Puy in central France down the pilgrim road to Santiago de Compostela is Spain.

One of the major problems the young cyclists face in our country, is the lack of ideal enviornment. In Dhaka city, there are shortages of open fields and quiet roads. The parks do not allow cyclists within their perimeters. In busy roads, which do not have any special lane for cycles, it becomes more difficult for the young cyclists to move along without mental tension.

The young bi-cyclists do not always have companions. So they do not feel encouraged.

survives as an absolute gem of

natural history.

around. An army officer, in his official dress, is never alowed to ride in a rickshaw, but a cycle is a dignified transport for him. Let us all learn from the chinese and popular-

To popularise cycling, first wells, with "donkeys" nodding quietly among the trees. Yet for 30 or so miles of designated Heritage Coast Purbeck

Purbeck has been pounded, pummelled, squeezed, folded, tipped on end, exposed, twisted, compressed and eroded. The consequence is an enormous diversity of landscape, as varied as you'll find anywhere in the country, packed within a nugget of countryside.

The Purbecks are threequarters washed by water, which is why they call the region an "Isle" although there is no coast road. Motorists can only get to the sea via a series of culs-de-sac, but walkers have a coastal footpath, part of the 515-mile South West Way which starts at Studland and goes the long way round to Minehead in Somerset.

I began another day at Lulworth Cove, that remarkably eroded claw of coastline instantly recognisable to anyone with a smattering of school geography. Today's erosion is more worrying. It comes not from the sea but the brigades of trppers stepping down from their coaches and advancing on the beach cafe for cuppas, pork pies and postcards of

Fergie. A pug sauntered past my table with adorned with a lebel saying "Don't feed me. I'm fat enough already." But, surprisingly, none of the customers were one.

ize cycling and forget the

Arabian proverb.

of all we should make up our

mind. The elders can come

forward and encourage their

children by taking a ride or

two with them. Some may even

try cycling as a new hobby. So

the younger people will fell en-

couraged and the cycle indus-

try will flourish. A club may

be set up by a group of cyclists

The government may come

forward by setting up a body to

popularise cycling. It may

establish clubs and lend bi-cy-

cles to eveybody at a nominal

mobility and independence.

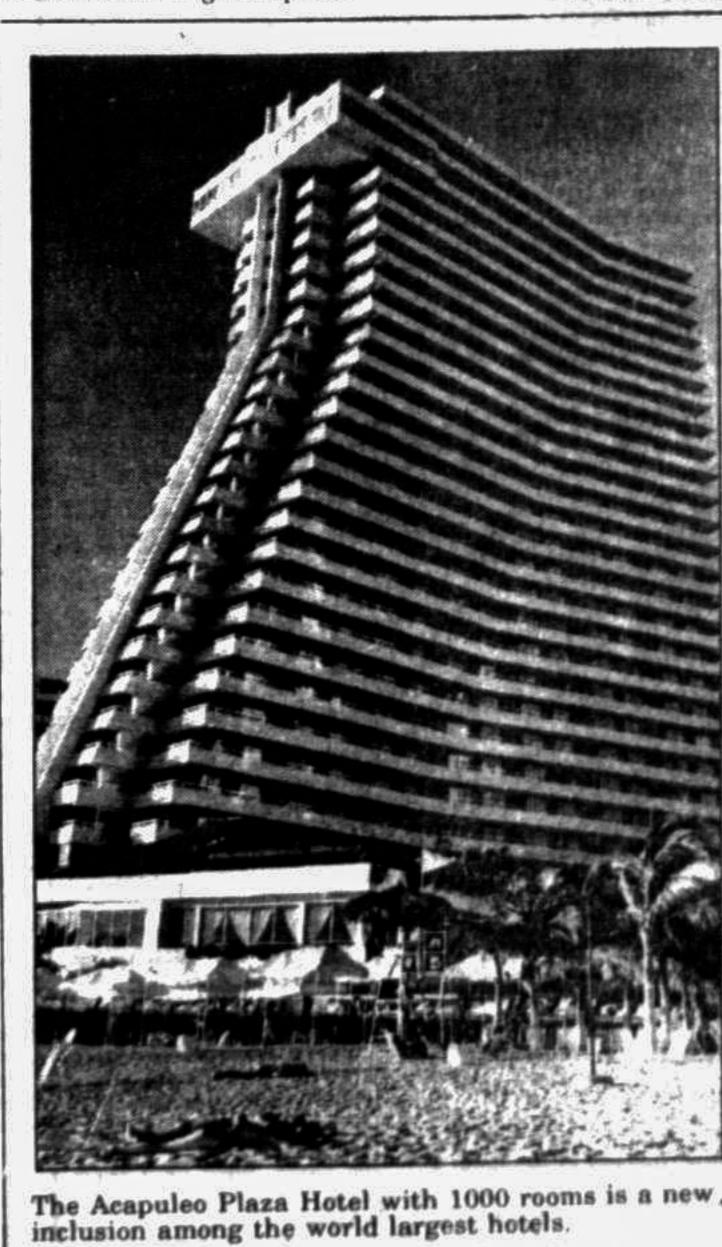
It's a dignified way of moving

A cycle heightens one's

in every locality.

The road signs hereabouts read "Sudden Gunfirel" ("Keep an eye out for tank shells, Mavis. We don't want our picnic ruined"). Lulworth marks the western boundary of the MoD's 7,000-acre Purbeck patch, out of bounds except for most weekends and school holidays.

Although much of the land is scarred by tank tracks and cratered by shells, the army's presence has also been a force for conservation. Its wide margins of safety have meant that enormous tracts of countryside, including hedgerows, uncultivated grasslands and woodlands, have been saved from intensive farming. forestation and probably caravan sites. Birds and animals thrive in these DMZs (Designated Military Zones), so much so that the army now has a problem keeping deer out of its sights. The base at Lulworth even has a Deer Of-fficer, no doubt a tricky image for a man of military might.



The Acapuleo Plaza Hotel with 1000 rooms is a new,