

TRAVELLING IN THE PHILIPPINES

Splendour of the Rice Terraces

by Nancy Wong

IN the Philippines, high on the traveller's itinerary must surely be the fabled rice terraces of Banau...

through typically tropical countryside with its lush greenery of rich ferns, wild orchids, bananas and coconut trees...

our hotel, a three-star lodging on a ridge overlooking acres and acres of rising and falling terraces...

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...

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



Aerial view of Banau rice terraces.

some eight hours. There are quite a few air-conditioned coaches which ply between Banau and the capital city during weekends...

went, the higher the gradient of the road, until we were well up in the mountains when we had our first glimpses of the rice terraces...

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-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 civilization?"...

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...

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

Now we are deep in the high mountains. When we consider that these rice terraces existed over 2,000 years ago, were carved out of the mountains with very primitive tools, our modern engineers can surely applaud the wonder of such a miracle...

It was twilight by the time we reached

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

by Habib Sadat Chowdhury

"Alajal minash shaitan" thus runs an Arabian proverb. It means "To make haste is satan's way".

But cycling is still a favourite hobby of the young apart from its being used as a means of transport by the elders. A cycle is a transport of delight.

How much enjoyable a ride can be?

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.

Cycling for physical fitness? We cannot expect much. But we may realise that by making cycling a daily habit, one can find a pleasant way of burning calories.

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.

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.

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 Europe, the fine weather of June brings with it the annual renaissance of this transport of delight. Cycles are dislodged from their winter hibernation in garages and garden sheds.

The young bi-cyclists do not always have companions. So they do not feel encouraged. To popularise cycling, first

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.

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 in Spain.

The government may come forward by setting up a body to popularise cycling. It may establish clubs and lend bicycles to everybody at a nominal rent.

A cycle heightens one's mobility and independence. It's a dignified way of moving around. An army officer, in his official dress, is never allowed to ride in a rickshaw, but a cycle is a dignified transport for him.

The government may come forward by setting up a body to popularise cycling. It may establish clubs and lend bicycles to everybody at a nominal rent.

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

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.

PURBECK A secret British isle

If one wants to show a foreigner 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 to the east of Corfe."

I took myself, following the bridleway along the crest of a wave, to Nine Barrow Down, resting place of Bronze Age warrior kings. The scene below was like a famous Five book jacket, a lost world of meadows, ancient copses and small fields bordered by bushy hedgerows.

To the north lay the expansive waters of Poole Harbour, flecked with hundreds of dinghy sails and edged on the Purbeck shore by saltmarshes and venous creeks. A few degrees to the east were acres of purple heatherlands and the marram grass-capped dunes

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 brigadier's dream on a steep grassy plug of land in a narrow break in the hills -- "Corfe" is old Dorset for "gap".

From the terrace of a wooden cafe on Studland's beach -- the best for bucket-and-spades -- 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, castoffs from the cliffs.

wells, with "donkeys" nodding quietly among the trees. Yet for 30 or so miles of designated Heritage Coast Purbeck survives as an absolute gem of natural history.

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.

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 trappers 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 label saying "Don't feed me. I'm fat enough already." But, surprisingly, none of the customers wore one.

The road signs hereabouts read "Sudden Gunfire!" ("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.



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.

THE village of Medjugorje, nestled in the Trilj mountains near Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast, is an unlikely setting for the country's most popular tourist destination.

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.

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 Virgin Mary.

The presence of the pilgrims 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.

Faced with the temptation of the hard currency windfall Medjugorje has created, the republic's hardline authorities have abandoned their usual anti-religious attitude.

Never in the history of Christianity has the Virgin Mary been reported to have appeared 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.

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.

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.

The dispute between the Franciscans and the local Church hierarchy is deep-seated. When the Ottoman Turks occupied the region the Franciscans alone stayed on to keep the Catholic faith alive.

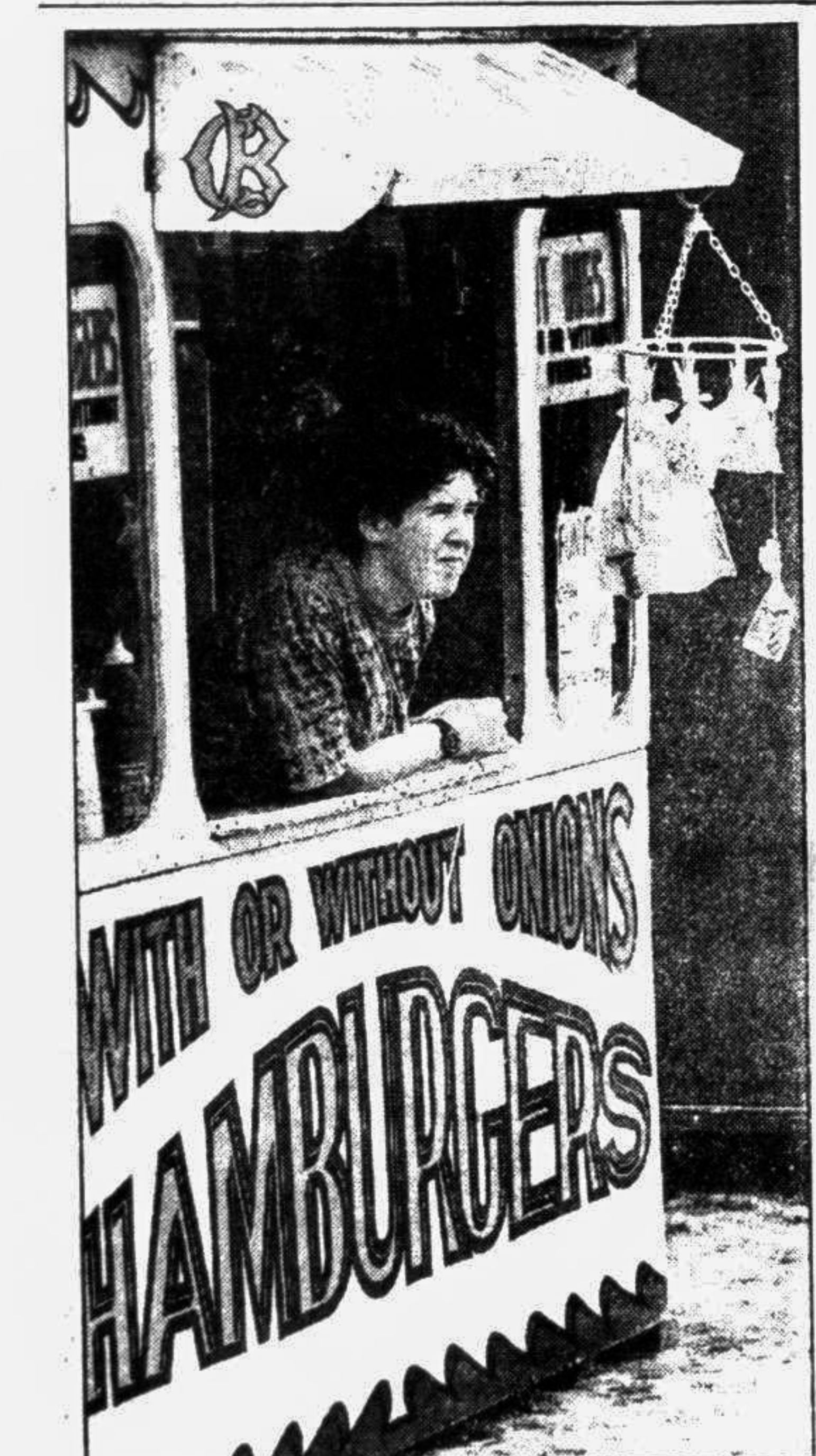
"I am firmly convinced the Medjugorje events are not supernatural but a show staged by the Franciscans," he said. "Their goal is to become powerful, to gain favours around the world and to get money, money and more money."

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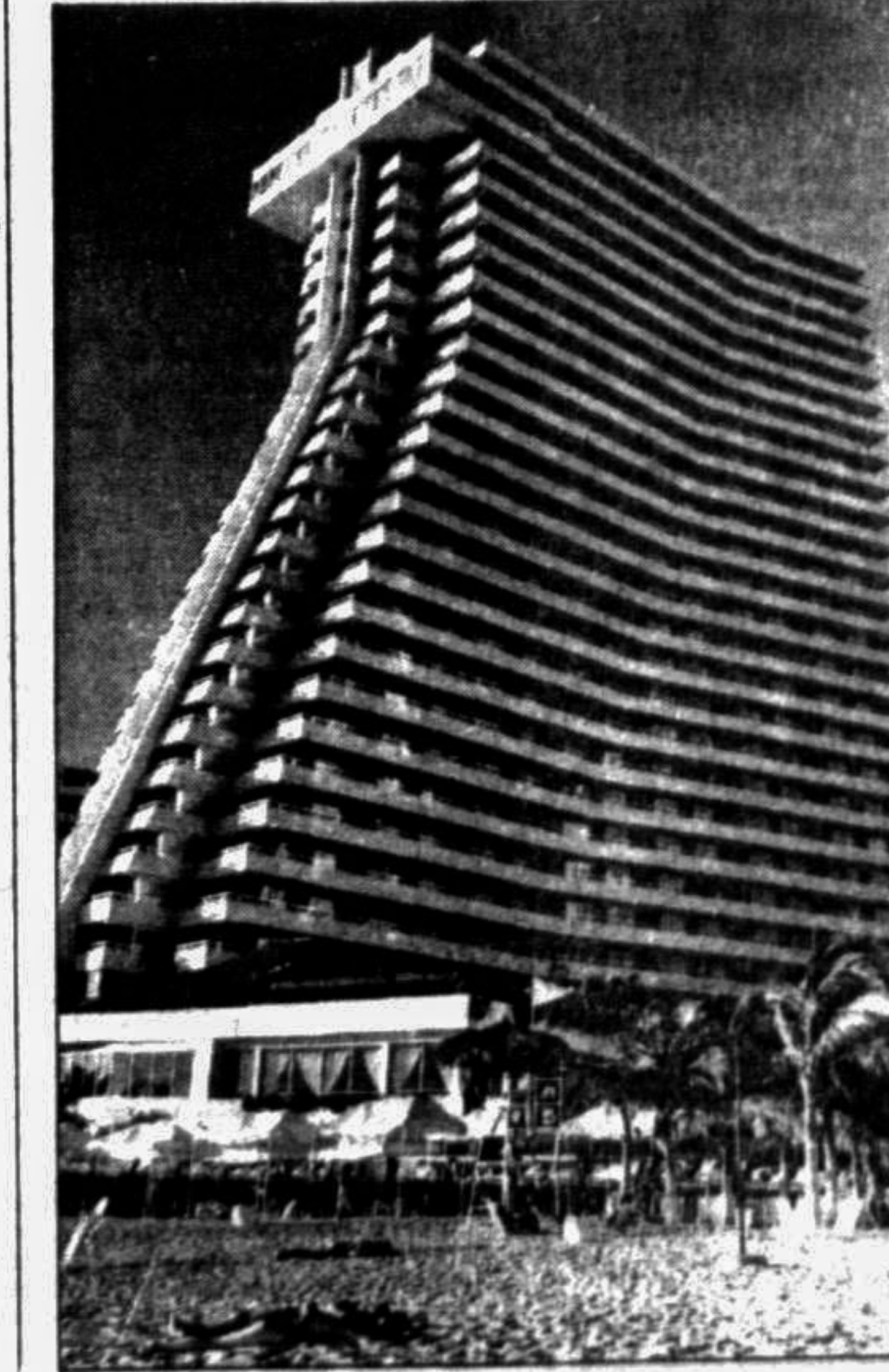
The Virgin Mary's first appearance came shortly after Zanic had dismissed two Franciscans in Mostar for indiscipline in 1981. According to visionaries, the Virgin deplored Zanic's haste.

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—GEMINI NEWS



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—D.W.