

DOES the past always look better looking back? Only the unaffected could wholly endorse Thomas Campbell's observation that "distance lends enchantment to the view."

Or agree uncritically with the 18th-Century Scottish poet's equally sweeping statement that armies "conquer but to save."

Surviving relatives of the tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians killed in the Gulf War may well think otherwise. Among their few consolations is the fact that the conflict was mercifully short, and that the past can spring no more shocks or tragedies.

There were plenty of these during 1991. But bizarre events have also made the world seem a more human place. For example:

- * An emergency service launched near Barcelona, Spain, providing motorcycle deliveries of condoms to unprepared couples in urgent need.

- * Japanese technologists' invention of an anti-purse-snatching device which sounds the alarm by playing 100 melodies including, "No, no, they can't take this away from me."

- * A campaign by Chicken's Lib activists for better treatment of intensively-reared hens in Britain.

Such happenings may well elicit amazement, wry amusement or anticipation of further light relief in the New Year.

What can be predicted is that 1992 will be a year of fewer barriers to mobility - for citizens of the 12 member-nations of the European Community, at least.

After 40 years' negotiation, these countries are due at the end of 1992 to remove remaining restrictions and usher in the stirringly-named "four freedoms of movement" - for people, capital, goods and services.

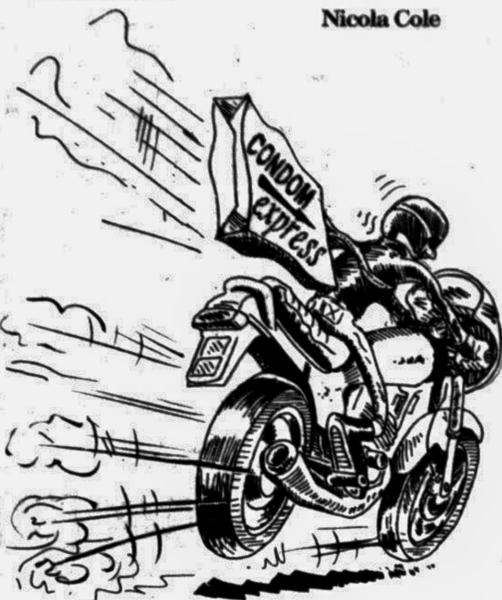
Once bureaucratic barriers fall, the Communities' 320 million citizens will be able to cross borders more easily - Belgium, France and Germany are already passport-free zones for Euro-travellers. Europeans will also be able to transfer professional skills with minimum formalities, and claim social and retirement benefits

Looking into 1992 . . .

Columbus Sailing Tops List Of Year's Anniversaries

Ninety-five years since the Yukon Gold Rush, with its 40-dollar breakfast and "easy" ladies paid in nuggets, 60 years since TV's pioneering broadcasts, and 30 years since the great unravelling of colonial power, 1992 will bring a surge of significant anniversaries, including some of national and global conflicts. Gemini News Service reflects on major turning points in years past, and on changes to come with the New Year.

Nicola Cole



For a safer 1992

where they please from Copenhagen to Crete.

While the European Parliament works towards a single currency unit-the ECU-the "single market" already comprises the largest international trading bloc, and is projected to create 1.8 million

jobs.

Businessmen will be able to set up foreign subsidiaries and export products with an ease and freedom from paperwork unknown since the days of Medieval merchant ventures.

As the so-called Old World looks forward to these enticing

prospects, the New World will cast a commemorative glance back to the first European who set foot in the Americas, Christopher Columbus.

Convinced a vast continent lay across the Atlantic, his belief fuelled by evidence of unknown plants and tribal debris washed up in Europe, the Italian-born explorer set out on his epic voyage on August 3, 1492.

After more than two months at sea and no sight of land, his 120 seamen threatened to mutiny and throw their captain overboard. "Are there no graves in Spain, that you should bring us here to perish?" they angrily demanded.

"Wait three days... if I land does not appear, then will I myself put my ship about and return," replied a brave Columbus, who was backed by the Spanish Queen.

On October 12, the crew raised a mighty cheer; far off on the distant horizon a silvery line of sand had appeared.

Columbus had reached the Bahamas - not India, as he had expected. He was later to land on the mainland of South America.

Australians, meanwhile, will celebrate the 60th birthday of Sydney Harbour Bridge, a symbol of national pride which has drawn comparisons with the United States.

The structure, opened in 1932, is just two feet short of being the largest single-span

bridge in the world. The record is still held by the 1,652-foot Bayonne Bridge, which went operational in New York State a year earlier.

Older Britons will recall the dire reversals of war in 1942, notably the fall of Tobruk and Singapore - and high points such as when Malta withstood enemy air attacks.

King George VI was to die of cancer 10 years later. The news was leaked by a Royal servant in the pay of a national newspaper.

This year sees the 40th anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth as Head of State and the Commonwealth.

Initial British bullishness about the second Elizabethan Age evaporated with the Suez Crisis. The winds of change blew a further chill reminder of the limited power now wielded by Britain and other once-imperial nations.

Just 30 years ago, fewer than seven colonial possessions gained independence - Algeria (after a bitter struggle with its French rulers), Burundi and Rwanda, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda. Tanganyika became a republic.

In 1992 the Republic of Bangladesh will celebrate two decades of independence. Former Asian residents of Uganda will have less enthusiastic memories of 1972 - the year President Idi Amin expelled 20,000 of them from the East African republic.

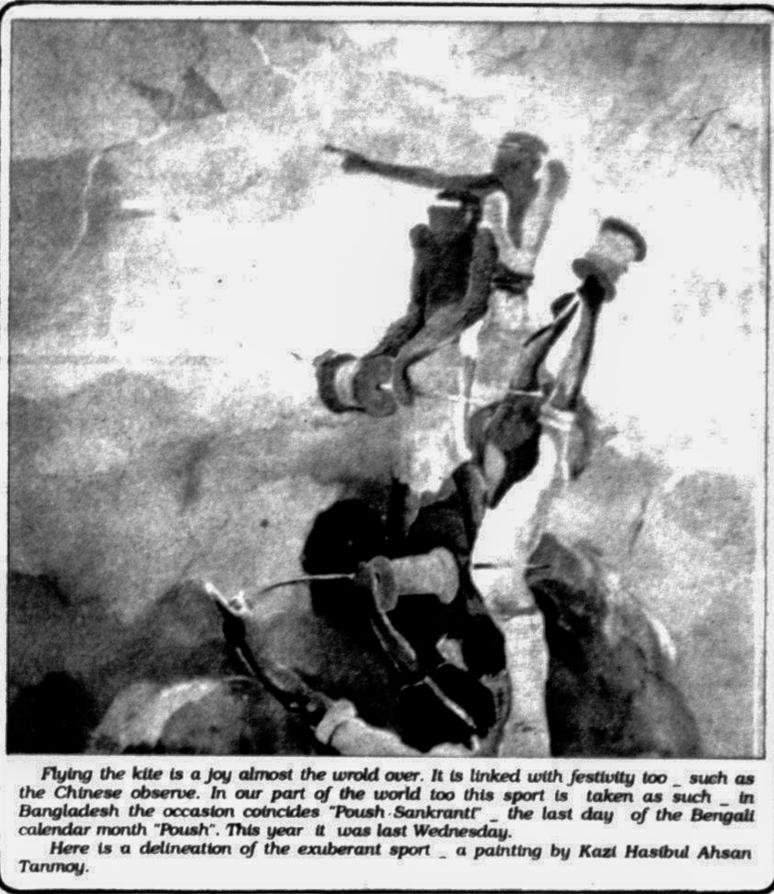
If Argentina and Britain would rather forget the Falklands (Malvinas) invasion 10 years ago in April, television - marking the 60th anniversary of its first experimental broadcasts - will doubtless screen graphic re-runs.

What might the poet Lord Tennyson, whose death centenary falls this year, have made of it?

Although not averse to glorifying bloodshed, his gentler sentiments would more likely have prevailed:

*Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.*

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Flying the kite is a joy almost the world over. It is linked with festivity too - such as the Chinese observe. In our part of the world too this sport is taken as such - in Bangladesh the occasion coincides "Poush-Sankranti" - the last day of the Bengali calendar month "Poush". This year it was last Wednesday. Here is a delineation of the exuberant sport - a painting by Kazi Hasibul Ahsan Tanmoy.

Nagorik's New Experiment

A Star Correspondent

AN artist loves his student. She in turn worships him. Till one day, she comes into her own and breaks free of his obsession. She marries another, a younger man. The woman (Sara Zaker) comes to tell her old lover of her new love: the artist (Jamaluddin) is seized with jealousy. As she turns to her new husband (Khaled Khan), he learns of her former affair and is tormented by the same reaction as the artist. "Ecrsha" (Jealousy) is the story and the title of Syed Shamsul Haq's latest creation.

sometimes rough around the edges, but Khan is obviously an actor of great sincerity and strength. It is a tribute to director Ataur Rahman that he has chosen the best possible actor for the role of the jealous young husband. Khan's bewilderment, refusal to face the truth, and final rejection of his wife are almost fluid-like in the natural way they play across his face.

echoing the golden age of English theatre. The sentences carry inner rhyme and rhythms which are easy to catch yet completely spontaneous. Syed Shamsul Haq's poetic talents have again brought a whiff of fresh air to Bengali theatre.

As the artist, Hossain is competent, his years of experience giving him a strong base. Though his staggering about in despair seems sometimes overdone, the violence in his reactions comes across very explicitly. Sara Zaker is not at her best; perhaps miscast, perhaps distracted; her soul is not in the role. The viewer can only hope that this actress who ranks among the best in the land will soon play a role that does her justice.

A lighting artist was especially flown in from Calcutta: Dilip Ghosh's dramatic light-effects did much to help the flow of the play. When the story has little action, the gestures of characters and the shift of lighting has to contribute to a feeling of movement.

The play does tend to drag at moments, probably due to the innovative structure. The seven monologue-idea is stretched a little too far. But the blank verse has a wonderfully natural cadence.

Bengali theatre has encompassed much politics and revenge. But the intimacies of a physical relationship have rarely been dealt with in so straightforward a manner. Though the erotic language once or twice seems too overbearing or obvious for subtlety, on the whole the play is refreshingly bold. Well-written, well-directed, and resting on Khaled Khan's inspired acting, it is yet another Nagorik production that is worth catching.

Conversation

(Continued from Page 9) kind for which there is a demand in India. From their side, we have a demand for coal, we have demands for things such as railways, parts, engines, we buy from them. Now in dealing with India several years back, with the joint economic commission, in which we can identify the areas in which we can move. This went in a way into abeyance. Relations went up and down. Again this has been revived. So the modalities of trade are not based on any abstract, trade has to be on specific items. For instance when

we talk about gas. We produce a lot of gas. There is only one country that can buy our gas, either through joint venture. Because liquified natural gas, nobody is going to buy from Bangladesh.

we allow them in - transit rights, the moment that we allow them IWTA rights immediately there is hue and cry politically.

Firstly we turn it to energy. Now, it is India. But the moment we talk gas, the bias in the country is, no, we are selling our sovereignty. India has an island which is the seven sisters, and it needs in transit railway lines. They need IWTA rights across, because they have to go long ferry routes. But the moment

there will be accusations that more is being smuggled out. We are subject to a lot of things. There are challenges and promises in our relationship within India, as indeed with every country we deal with.

DS: We should end this conversation on this nice note. Thank you, Mr Foreign Minister, for your time.

A visit to the Mainamati Museum is a treat indeed, not only for the foreigner, but for the residents of Bangladesh as well. Even though, during the Liberation period, the museum had been pillaged by marauders - according to the reports of the museum authorities - what one finds is a treasure-trove of culture and civilization. Some of the antiques from Mainamati, Comilla, are also to be seen at the Dhaka Museum.

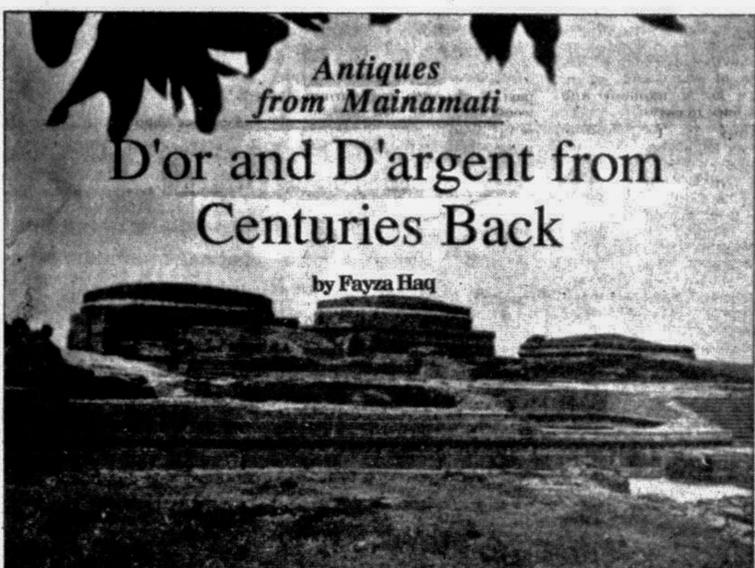
For people who may imagine that Bangladesh does not have a history that goes beyond that of the visitors from Delhi, and the followers of Taimur, one has only to witness the gorgeous artistic works, that one can see in the coins, sculpture pieces, terracotta plaques, pottery, and the nonpareil images of the Hindu gods and goddesses - which one understands - were also revered by the Buddhists.

One of the first items discovered by the Archaeological Museum, Mainamati, that captures one's fancy, are the royal copper plates. One of them, a copper plate, with writings on the reverse, and the "Dharmachakra" which is decorated with two seated deer. There is a second copper plate, found in "Salvan Vihara", the admirable monastery nearby, that has identical symbols of the "Dharmachakra". Here one finds chouching bulls for elaborations. As it is somewhat corroded, it is difficult to decipher. The royal copper plates also include ones that originate from the "Chandra" period. The Chandras, incidentally, ruled Khulna, Jessore and Faridpur. A fourth plate bears a "Vishnu" wheel.

The coins in the Mainamati collection include 227 coins, the majority of them being of silver. The gold coins carry value because they represent the earliest coinage recovered from this region. Two of the gold coins belong to the "Gupta" period, and bear horses and have ornamental pedestals included in the decoration. There is the "Lashmi and Archer" type coin from the same period, and it is typically Indian in style, which has remained the model for eastern India for over three centuries since the fall of the Mainamati rulers.

An interesting coin is the "Sri Vangla Mriganka" one, which was discovered along with three gold earrings. This carefully executed coin speaks of the prosperity of south east Bengal, during the reign of the "Devas".

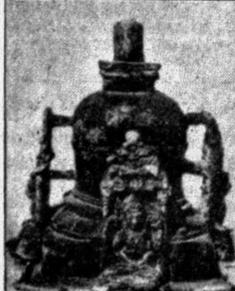
There are 223 silver coins, inscribed with "Pattikera" and other with "Lalitkera Dharma Vijay", and they are decorated with motifs of the seated bull, a trident and symbols of the sun and moon. From these proofs it is apparent that the coins were minted probably by the "Deva" rulers.



Kutila Mura stupas ver and the other gold - are from the Abbasid rulers of Baghdad period, and they bear "Kufic" Arabic inscriptions. This proves that there was regular trade between the Arab countries and Bangladesh during the pre-Muslim times.

The discovery of the coins from the cells of the monastery shows the property of the Buddhists who lived in Bengal, centuries back.

As regards the terracotta sealings and clay stupas, the sunbaked clay figures with the eight-handed "Taras" and "Jamvalas" are most praiseworthy. A number of terracotta sealings, originating from the Buddhist belief, have also been found from the cells of the neighbouring "Salvan Vihara".



Bronze Votive Stupa

The "Dharmachakra" in them is flanked by seated deer and the inscriptions indicate clearly the reign of "Bhavadeva" in the "Deva" dynasty. The bronze sculptures include a large number of bronze sculptures, mainly statues of "Buddha", "Bodhisattva" and "Tara". The sculpture pieces delineate a change in

"Mahayana" Buddhism in the seventh to eighth century A.D. in Bangladesh.

At that time, Buddhism was almost extinct in north and south India, but it flourished in south-east Bengal - under the reign of the "Palas". The "Devas" and "Chandras" were the major patrons of the Buddhist culture. Brahmanical "Tantricism" and Buddhist beliefs influenced each other, and various Hindu deities were also accepted by the Buddhists. The bronze sculptures, found in Mainamati, belong to this phase of Buddhism.

The largest group of the bronze sculpture include the statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as statues of "Tara". They are all carefully finished. The largest image in this group is of six-inches, while the smallest comprises only two inches. A gorgeous bronze image of Bodhisattva "Manjusri", surrounded by eight other gods and goddesses, is surely the best bronze sculpture from Mainamati.

The "Sarvani" image, on her lion, is another good example of fine sculpture. A Buddha image is on a pedestal with rose petals, with lions on four corners. Seated bulls are also found in this creation - although the images are today seen in a damaged condition.

Only a small portion of the Mainamati sculptures belong to the seventh century A.D. Probably, in later dates, there might have been a fully developed Bengal school of sculptures.

Among the other bronze items of any consequence, are the solid stupas, each of the four sides of which are decorated with figures. Found at "Kutila Mura", they symbolise

the standard stupa of the period, which is not found in any complete form in Bangladesh.

As for the stone sculptures and the terracotta plaques there are sculptures which are of grey clay-stone, and comprise a collection of miniature Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other deities are also found on lotus stalks and pedestals, decorated with devotees. These pieces lack the finesse of the "Gupta" sculptures.

There are numerous terracotta plaques, which were found in "Salvan Vihara" and are presented in a single row. Apart from these there are a large number of antiques obtained from "Salvan Vihara", "Mura Ananda Vihara" and "Charpatra Mura". These represent the folk-art of the time. Horses, crouching lions, snakes, peacocks from "Salvan Vihara" are there along with delineation of mongoose, crocodile and fish. The



Stone relief of Avalokitesvara

"Triratna", "Dharmachakra" and the trident are all there too. One gets a fair notion of the religious beliefs of the time, as well as the life style of that period.

Jewellery in the form of gold and silver bangles are also found here along with circular ingots of gold. It is believed that they were perhaps the offerings of the followers of the monks. There are household utensils too such as pots, plates, dishes and spoons in metal. The knives and digging tools, along with hinges and nails too fascinate the viewer.

The pottery includes jars for medicines, found in "Salvan Vihara". There are images of roaring lions, seated deities, and gods and goddesses wearing rich ornaments. The deities are decorated with anklets, bracelets, armbands and many-layered chains. These include the delineation of "Sakti", who is surrounded with four-handed goddesses, and the image of "Ganesh" in black-basalt, with his left leg stretched out. In his upper left hand he bears a tray of sweetsmeats.

The Mainamati excavations present objects of art and articles of daily use, and they have given us an insight into the life of the people of the region, centuries back. They also reflect the existence of powerful rulers who initiated these items of beauty and precision.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,
A long time ago you advised a woman who as not having a baby to stop worrying and relax. This is easier said than done. Being a sufferer myself I know. The pain and agony will be understood only by some one who has gone through it herself so don't ask such people to relax, believe me it does not work.
Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,
I did not ask anyone to just relax, but merely to face reality. However painful the fact of not being able to have a baby might be, it is certainly not the end of the world, there are other things in life, things to enjoy, and learn. I am not being insensitive to anyone's feelings, but we have to realise that few things in life are out of our control.

Dear Mita,
My mother died when we were very young and my father did not remarry fearing we might suffer a step-mother. Now he is 58 and very lonely. I think he would like to get married but my sister who is his favorite does not agree. She says if he did not marry for so long why does he want to do it now, what do you think?
Shahana, Dhaka.

Dear Shahana,
If your father finds a suitable woman to marry, he should go right ahead and do it. It is also normal for a favorite child to feel a little jealous, but she will eventually understand especially if things work out well.

Dear Mita,
Two years ago my parents married me off to a person I had never seen or met. We had problems right from the beginning and my parents realised they had made a mistake. Now they are the ones who want me to get a divorce but I want to give it another try. What is your advice?
Anonymous, Chittagong.

Dear Anonymous,
It is difficult to advice you because you have not specified the nature of your problems with your husband. But most problems can be worked out if there is a sincere effort from both sides. Interference from parents, however well meant, can do more harm than good. I would certainly advise you to give it another try.

Dear Mita,
My child was very sick last month with temperature going up to 105°. Doctor advised he should be given a cold shower or immersed in a tub of water when the temperature went that high. My mother-in-law did not allow this and insisted he would catch a cold. She is very old fashioned and believes in her own ways. My son recovered but suffered a lot. How can I convince her?
Salma, Shantinagar, Dhaka.

Dear Salma,
Elderly people have problems accepting new ways of treatment, but are often convinced when they see positive results. Maybe you should ask the doctor to tell her instead of you. She might listen to him/her. As for taking her advice, you will have to use your judgement and do what you and your husband think is best for the children when they are sick.