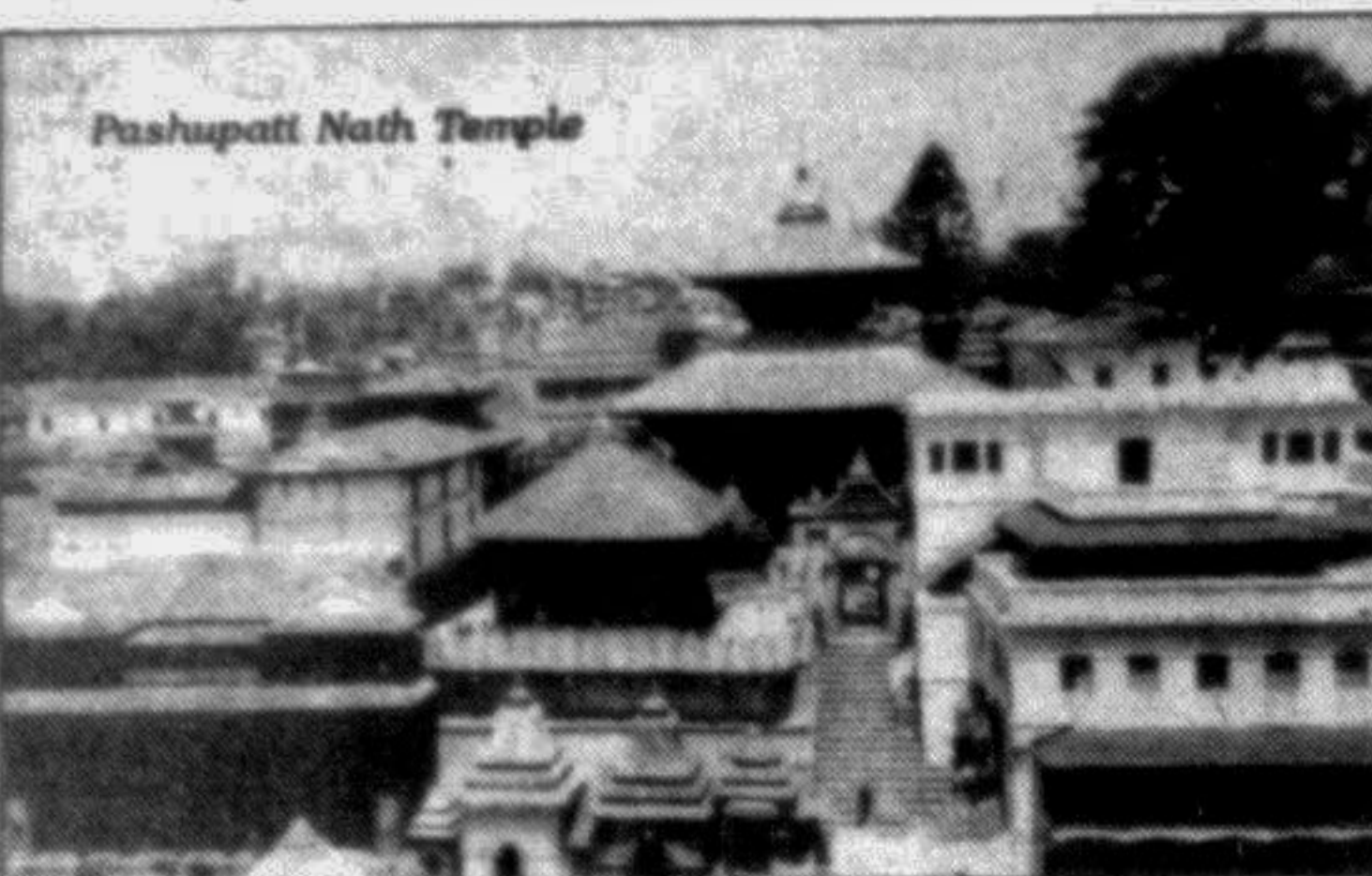


Kathmandu: Pollution Hits Hard in the Serenity

by Masud Hasan Khan, Reporter



Pashupati Nath Temple

As the aircraft hovered low over the capital of Nepal, the expanse of bowl-shaped valley came into view beneath the clouds and a pall of smog. Yes, it's unmistakably Kathmandu.

But to a traveller from plains like Bangladesh, landing at the Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport gives a kind of wired feeling. The airport is located high above the city plains, the zigzag mountain range around the valley is even higher, unevenly breaking the sky line.

You smell fresh and biting wind that blow over the airport while watching the dusts and smokes from the brick kilns and a nearby fertilizer factory roll down the city.

Fresh air hardly goes down to the valley because the city heat always tends to push it up the mid hills around.

A taxi drive from the airport takes you back to a city where the ancient temples with intricate lattices stand side by side, the modern buildings. Nowhere you find such all the races of the world together except in Kathmandu. A first visit to Kathmandu is more of a mixed feeling of the known and the unknown.

Kathmandu valley, some 1400 metres above the sea level, was divided into several city-states in ancient times. In 1768, Prithvi Narayan Shah, ancestor to the present monarch, conquered three principalities of the valley — Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur — and founded a unified kingdom. Kathmandu was made the national capital.

The capital derives its name from a Hindu temple 'Kasthamandap', which is still there.

Kathmandu is a city of temples, stupas and hotels. At every city kerb, there is one or two small temples. Pious people, with holy spot of vermilion and sandal on their forehead, stop by to pray or ring the ancient bells. Sometimes, they roll the Tibetan prayer wheels saying "Om Mani Padme Home...".

At the Kathmandu's main Durbar Square alone there are at least 14 temples including Kageswar temple, Hanuman statue, Kasthamandap, Naru Ganesh, Maha Vishnu temple, Jagannath temple, Shiva Parvati temple and Vishnu temple.

The Durbar Square, Royal Palace, Durbar Marg, Mangal Bazar at the old city of Patan, Swayambhunath Stupa, Pashupatinath temple, Buddhath Stupa, Singha Durbar, National Museum, Thamel and Baghbazar are some of the main tourist attractions in Kathmandu city.

The roads of Kathmandu are like any thoroughfares in any developing country. Except the main Kantipath, New Road, Ramshapath and the Ring Road, the narrow alleys, particularly those in the older part of the city, remind of Suvarpur or Shankharbazar areas of Dhaka. Like Shankharbazar, these parts are equally vibrant with life.

Without hotels, life of Kathmandu would have been half of what it is now. One senior government official said that at Thamel alone, which is the main tourist and hippy hangout, there are 800 hotels.

Besides, there are innumerable restaurants, pubs and shops. These shops, restaurants and pubs open at 10 am and remain open until 8 in the evening. The hotels are open round the clock.

The tourist spots are full of pavement shops. Anything and everything could be bought from the vendors selling Nepalese curio, traditional knives called 'kukri', bracelets, bangles made of metal and yak bone, necklace, Bhutanese masks, traditional cloths as well as traditional cymbals.

After 8 pm, Kathmandu gradually falls into a deep slumber. The dark streets are deserted. Only the occasional whistles by the policemen and the frequent barking of the city dogs could be heard. Kathmandu is also a city of dogs.

There are dogs every where. Scotch spaniels, Pekinese, Collies, Dutch-hounds, Cocker spaniels and Alsatians abound the Kathmandu streets.

Citizens guessed that these canines were brought in the kingdom during the British rule in the subcontinent. Some of them must have had deserted their masters and became stray in love of the 'congenial' weather of Kathmandu. The conditions of two rivers Bagmati and Vishnumati, that run through Kathmandu city, are truly miserable. It seemed that the city planners have kept out the two unpredictable mountain rivers from their beautification programme.

Because of the continued waste disposal, Bagmati and Vishnumati have virtually become two open-air sewers.

Warmth in the heart

But the most appealing thing about Nepal is the warmth in the heart of its people. They are smiling and always ready to help, as if they do not know the meaning of the word "stranger".

They are never less attentive to the foreigners, partly because of their highly-developed tourism industry, the biggest foreign exchange earning sector.

Kathmandu, perhaps, has the smartest policemen in South Asia. Well-dressed police officials, on foot or mounted, regularly patrol the streets of Kathmandu day and night. They are very watchful of everything that takes place around them. Citizens of Kathmandu said that crime rate in their city was very low — and there's simply no mugging, believe it or not.

A short visit to Kathmandu is never an eye-opener for the tourists.

That's why travellers from all the corners of the globe keep coming to this cool mountain city again and again, like Joseph Dracan.

Dracan is a deserter of the war over Bosnia-Herzegovina. He came to Kathmandu back in January and he had some uncut stones with him.

The 34-year-old miner polished the stones at Kathmandu and was trying to sell those at a Thamel street corners.

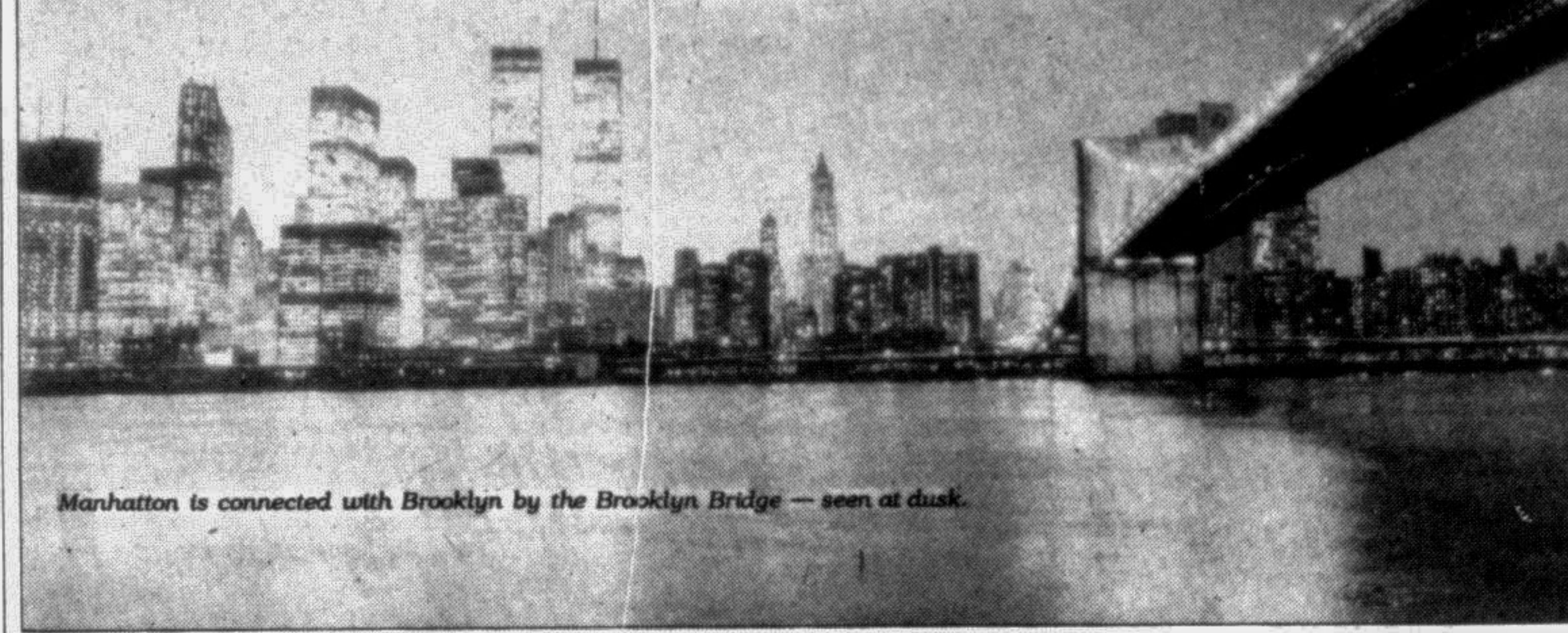
"This is a mad war going on there," said Dracan in his pidgin English, "but here, you can feel the real peace. Peace in this Kathmandu."

People and Places

In recent weeks, two reporters and a guest columnist of The Daily Star went on visits to three cities in different parts of the world, to Kathmandu, Berlin and New York. Despite their round-the-clock professional engagements, each one took time off to smell the noise of these uniquely different cities, doing some sight-seeing, talking to people, looking at the shops and sampling local food. Their experiences are covered in three separate reports, published here today.

The Changing and Unchanging New York Snap Shots from a Nostalgic Trip

by Shaheen Anam, Guest Columnist



Manhattan is connected with Brooklyn by the Brooklyn Bridge — seen at dusk.

LAST month I went on an official trip to the Big Apple, as New York is popularly called. I was going back to a city I left eight years ago. From a full time housewife I turned into a full time student and then a professional social worker — all within the span of three and a half years. That I lived in New York with my family, I left a year after Reagan's re-election. I witnessed the rise of the "yuppie" phenomenon and also the bewilderment and anguish of my social worker friends who were desperately trying to give a humane face to this exciting, wonderful and yet brutal of all cities.

So much has changed in the world, since I left New York. As I began my trip, I was anxiously and excitedly awaiting to find out the changes that might have gone through by the most favourite of my cities, New York. A plaque on the northern tip of Manhattan, close to Columbia University, proclaims that a Dutch called Peter Minuit, bought this island from the Indians for 60 guilders in 1626. (I mention Manhattan though it is only one of the five boroughs of New York City, yet it is here that the heart of the City of New York beats and here is the skyline that symbolises the city throughout the world). Since then not a day has passed that the city has not changed in facade, character or spirit.

From a desolate island it turned into the concrete jungle that has become almost a folklore of modern architecture. But that is not only what the city is famous for. It boasts of 500 museums and art galleries, the biggest and the largest indoor theatre in the world, the Radio City Music Hall, and it is host to more than 17 million tourists a year. The city also abounds with beautiful Gothic structures of marble and stone. It is said that there is more stone and marble in the churches, facades, hotel lobbies and buildings of Manhattan than all of Rome. But if the city is interesting for its sights and sounds, it is also unique because of its people. The diversity of culture of its people and their far stretched origins give the charm, flavour and cosmopolitan character to the city which is unparalleled in the world.

How much had the city changed since I saw it eight years ago? Apparently it still looked the same. The streets and avenues simply sparkling in the early summer sun. People in the streets looked gay and happy, enjoying the warmth after a long dreary winter. The Rockefeller Centre, 5th Avenue, 34th Street all bustling with their

usual liveliness. The streets vendors with books, heads and necklaces were still plying the streets. The students were still distributing leaflets and the Chrysler building gleaming in the clear summer sky.

Subtle changes

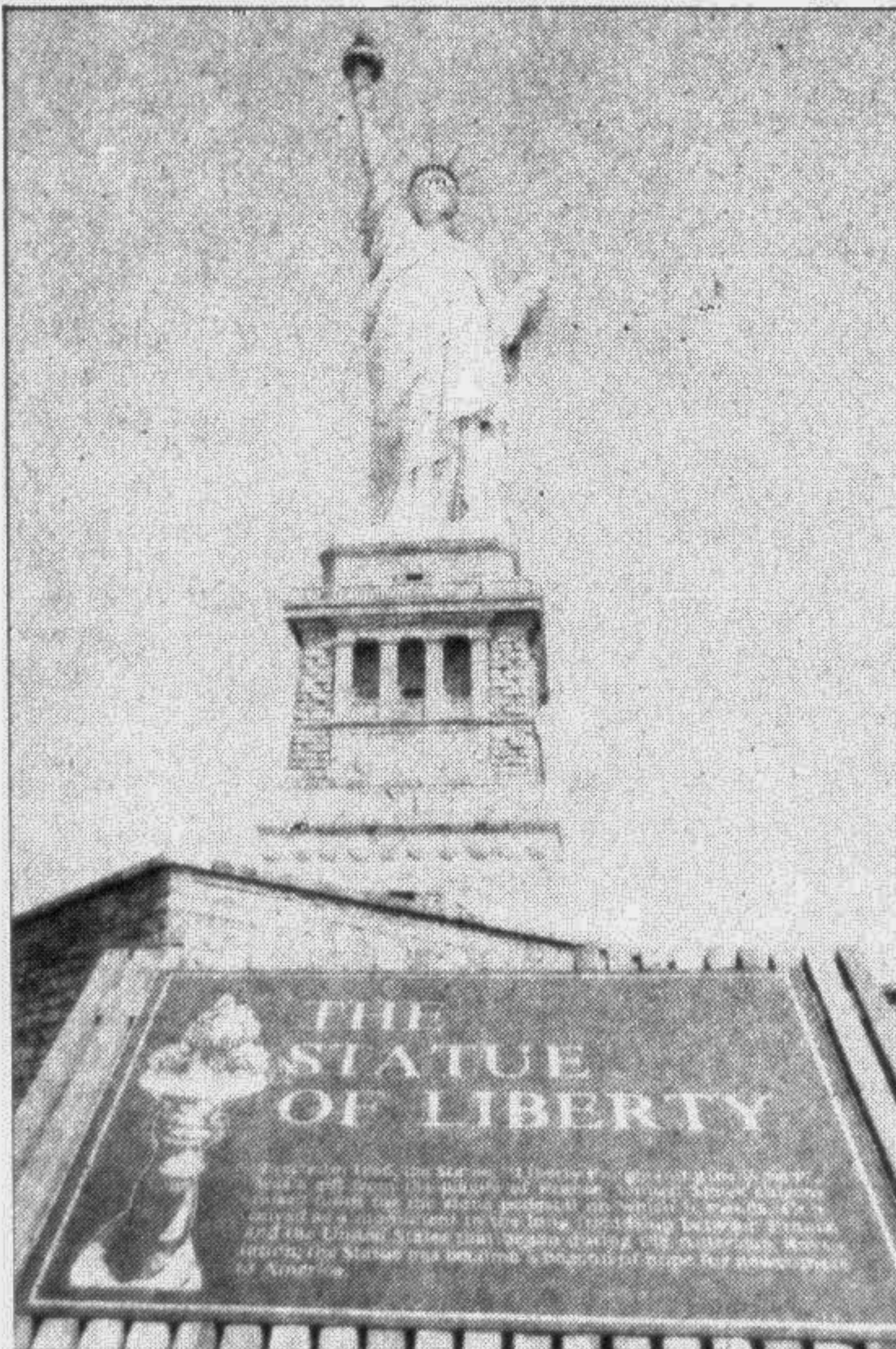
Yet, it had changed in many subtle ways. The most apparent was the closure of small and large business houses. The recession had actually hit hard at all sections of the community. The small camera shops on 42nd street were no longer there. Alexander, the chain department store which used to be called the poorman's shopping place closed down last year. The more depressing changes were, of course, the increase in the homeless population. With unemployment at 7% and more people losing their jobs, the future looks bleak for many. My friends said that 12 years of Republican administration had really scraped the bottom from most social benefits that people were entitled to. The obvious question is, do people envisage a change for the better under the present administration? Well, it will be a long time till things start looking better. This was very clear from long lines of the homeless and people still queuing up for food or looking

for places to stay. There is a serious crack in the "safety-net" that was promised to people after the Second World War.

The upbeat mood

In spite of it all I found the mood was upbeat. People, though disillusioned, still are clinging on to hope that the new administration will somehow stem the tide and change things around. I remembered Clinton's election and the hope and excitement it had generated even for us living in Bangladesh. Standing on the edge of Harlem one day I thought that Clinton has to act fast if he wants to keep some of that hope alive.

But as far as I am concerned, there is another reason to feel upbeat and that is the spirit of its people. In spite of all the negative aspects of the city such as mugging, violence, hunger, homelessness etc, there is one quality of its people that makes the city humane and livable. It is the culture of voluntarism in the society. There are some very special people in the city, some of whom I have the honour of knowing personally, who give a humane face to this otherwise brutal city. These are people who care, who are willing to volunteer their time and their resources to help the



Berlin Fights on for Economic Revival with East-West Difference still Apparent

by Nazmul Ashraf, Reporter

THE Mercedes convertible taxi was running smoothly. All on a sudden there was a jerk — quite unexpected in a city like Berlin. To relieve our concern

there was the taxi driver, clad in jeans trousers and a print shirt. "This was the Berlin Wall". And no doubt, before he could finish his words, all of us were staring through the panes — out there.

Leaving behind rings of dust, the four-door sedan rolled on over the historic site. The wall was no more, but the debris were still there.

The westerner driver, speaking in English, was quite friendly, informative and cooperative — all that proved the common hypothesis about the German arrogance wrong. In fact, it was he, who voluntarily informed us something that we needed to know to stay in Berlin. He seemed to be a bit proud of being one from the West. "I can speak English. And most of the Westerners know more than one language which is rare in the East", he said indicating the difference between the two parts of Germany.

Crossing through the Berlin Wall site, and entering East Berlin we all felt that the osmosis was not still over. Through the windshields, we looked around. Life in the east seemed quite dull. Besides, the high-rise buildings sighted along the streets behind, also proved the difference.

It was about four in the afternoon, we reached the Berlin City Apartment, our sojourn, at Prenzlauer Berg, We, 26 journalists from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, South America, West and East Europe stayed in the hotel. It was a one-day Media Seminar on AIDS, sponsored by the London-based Panos Institute jointly with Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, and followed by the Ninth International Conference on AIDS, that took us to Berlin.

The lingual problem began with the receptionist, a blue-eyed longhaired young chap. He failed to follow us, all communicating only in English. Thanks to the pretty lady who came to salvage us by speaking some English.

Unfortunately, none of our hosts were present there at the moment. Anyway, we then took over charges of our respective rooms in the hotel. The hotel in East Berlin, however, was not as much decorated as to specially attract the sponsored journalists, myself included. Each of us, after a long journey from home, had our belated launch at a restaurant, near the hotel. And tired as we were, going back to our hotel rooms, collapsed into sleep.

I woke up with somebody knocking at the door. It was almost seven, but not evening yet. Because, in the summer, the sun sets here at nine—a 15-hour day time that I ever had. Juliet Heller, Laurence Zavrie and James Deane, all from Panos that sponsored our trip, accommodation and food in collaboration with various other international organisations, came in and offered my per diem. They went off shortly after reminding me of the reception, arranged for the mediemen by the American Medical Association.

They say it's summer. But I felt it like almost winter in our country. I wore my jeans shirt to the reception programme.

Berlin, the focal point of Germany, echoes history—a century from Kaiser to Hitler. On my first day in the city, the life, seemed far away from the

tumult of neo-Nazis; a city also far away from the world of high business and corporate dealings. However, on our way back to hotel from the reception venue, I witnessed and anti-Turk riot scene in the street, of course an isolated incident.

Eating out is a problem

Eating out in Berlin proved a real problem for a Bengali-Muslim like me. It was difficult to choose an item from the menu, offered by the restaurants, without pork. Usual drinking water was rare. It was only at my hotel room that I drank plain tap-water, although they said it was not adequately safe.

It was a great pleasure for me when I discovered an Indian restaurant with the help of a Bangladeshi gentleman. Indians run several restaurants in Berlin. One or two others are run by Bangladeshis too. But we could not locate any, immigrants from Bangladesh, India and other South Asian countries mainly serve at these restaurants. The one where I had my traditional delicious food was owned by a Sikh. I ate plenty of *singara*, rice and chicken-curry and drank quantum of plain water unlike any other day of my stay in Berlin. I found Europeans and Americans other than the locals, taking Asian food there.

During my five-day sojourn in Berlin, I had the opportunity to eat beef only at the cafeteria of Free University in Hindenburgdamm, where the Panos/DAH-organised Media Seminar took place. Chicken and other *Halal* foods were available at the Turkish restaurants, but I had little opportunity to find them out.

While walking through the streets of Berlin, I also found frenzied crowds, mainly in the West Berlin where life is more vibrant than in the east. Either passers-by or travellers, they seemed too busy, moving fast and perhaps, had no time to stand and stare. Whenever I asked anybody, a lady or a gentleman, about a direction or location he/she talked to me while walking, never paused.

Begging, but...

What surprised me were the sort of beggars. Playing their guitar, violin or pipe, they are usually seen at the metro rail stations. All youngsters between 10 and 25. A Bangladeshi friend explained that they were mostly students of different musical schools. They beg to meet their expenses of learning music!

Hawkers with spectacles, toys and T-shirts are also a usual scene on the sidewalks. I even witnessed palmists and gamblers in their pursuits on the footpaths.

One needs not to be in the fray to take a ride on a bus, a tram or a train here. Considering the high charges, we restrained from hiring taxis and started using either of the cheaper contraptions. From our hotel in East Berlin to the ICC in the west, we however, had to have break-journeys with all the three modes of transports. Fleets of buses move around the city in various routes morning till mid-night.

A little mistake in choosing the right bus can lead one to the experience of the unknown, not always pleasant, as it occurred with me while

Continued on page 11



Participants at this year's AIDS Conference managed to find time to get a taste of some of the city's cultural life when they heard Verdi's Requiem at the Waldbuhne — the city's answer to Tanglewood in the United States or Hampstead Heath in London.



Darbar Square