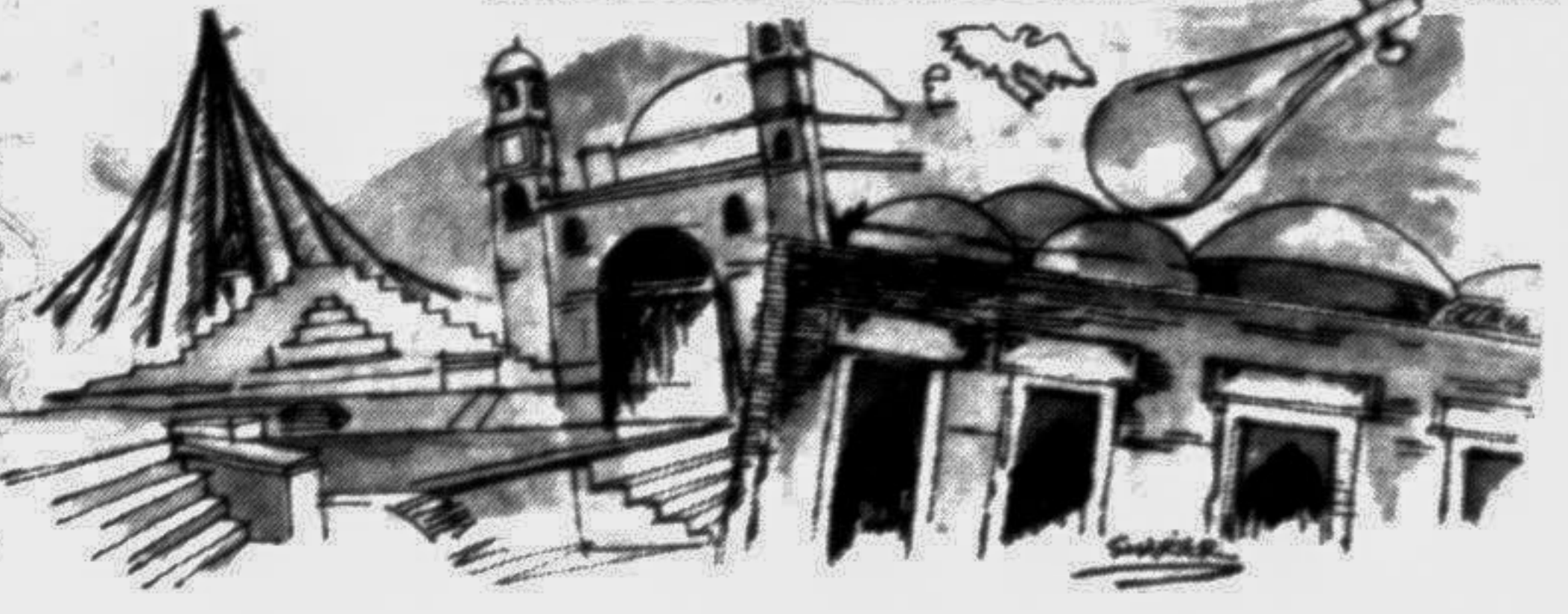


Travel & Tourism



In Celebration of Tourism

BANGLADESH is observing National Tourism Month for the second consecutive year. But the month-long celebration has failed to attract foreign nationals.

According to a market forecast, tourism is the world's highest income-generating sector. The number of jobs in this sector will increase by thirty-three percent by 2005. In Asia Pacific alone this year, tourism provided 35 million jobs. International tourism earned more than \$350 billion during the year.

The national tourism month increased awareness about the high potential of tourism in Bangladesh. Only a few hundred people visit Bangladesh each year. Foreign businessmen and officials are counted as tourists in this country.

By Staff Correspondent

Tourism in Bangladesh suffers from lack of priority, planning, and funds. The country also suffers an image problem. It is known as a country of endless natural calamities. The world knows nothing about the country's national beauty or its friendly and interesting people.

Other SAARC countries fare better than Bangladesh. India, for example, has a booming tourism industry. While people believe it is difficult to attract tourists to a predominantly Muslim country like Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia have consistently passed the four million mark for foreign visitors.

Bangladesh boasts the longest sea beach in Asia, the vast Sundarban mangroves.

rich tribal villages, and ancient archaeological excavations. To explore development of tourism in these areas, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism requested Taka 200 crore last year. Parjatan Corporation, noticed a steady growth in earnings, from \$15 million in 1993 to \$8.25 million during the previous year. The duty free shops were also very profitable last year. Further growth in tourism is expected in the current year. Private tour operators expressed an interest to invest in tourism in Bangladesh. Fifteen companies have enlisted with the Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB).

A realistic program must be undertaken to develop tourism in Bangladesh. We hope Tourism Month '94 will provide the encouragement for such a program.

Insights on Tourism from ATAB



In an interview with The Daily Star, M. M. Iqbal, president of the Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) discussed the role of travel agencies in tourism.

In most countries a travel agent is also a tour operator. But in our country, some, 1,000 travel agencies just sell airline tickets. They contribute little to tourism. If these 1000 organisations came forward to promote tourism in the country, they could effect great changes.

ATAB members handled 95 per cent of tickets sold in the country last year. The travel agencies enjoy monopoly in the ticket selling business in Bangladesh. Individual agencies raised ticket prices by more than 250 per cent during the past several years.

"The price of an airline ticket is the highest from Bangladesh to any destination," Mr. Iqbal told The Daily Star.

Recently, foreign airlines have signed sharing contracts with Bangladesh Biman regarding passengers and ticket prices. If these airlines offer competitive prices, traffic movement in the country will rise.

The travel agency is a growing business in Bangladesh. While business in the aviation sector rose by about 30 per cent in the past five years, the number of agencies increased from 500 to 1000.

Travel agencies are in a key position to help tourism in the country. The government realizes this, and has entered discussions with ATAB.

Interviewed by Astuzzaman

A Parjatan rally on the occasion of Tourism Month in the city.



Star photo

Saudi Arabia: Architectural Attractions

From Our Staff Correspondent

THE land of holy worship is often thought of as just that, the site of the Haj. But Saudi Arabia can claim tourist attraction on more grounds, such as its beautiful ancient architecture.

Until recently, Saudi Arabia was free from the pressures of urban modernisation. This means that a vast majority of its buildings were constructed according to the architecture of a hundred years ago. Four main Saudi architectures exist, characterised by four different regions - eastern Najd, central Hijaz, southern Hijaz and Asir, and the Arabian Gulf coast.

In eastern Najd, stone forms the foundation of the building. The walls are built with unfired brick and finished with mud-plaster. These walls are built thick to provide insulation against both the cold and the heat of the desert sun. The roof is built with palm matting and twigs, resting atop wooden beams and covered with mud.

Najd houses are built low, usually not more than three stories tall, and specially constructed to provide privacy. The actual building is surrounded by a courtyard and a high wall. All doors and windows are made out of wood. Colourful geometrical incisions in wood decorate the doors and shutters.

Lower rooms form storage areas, while guests are received on higher floors. In a corner of the guest room, there is usually a hearth to make coffee.

Central Hijaz includes Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah. The architecture in this area is influenced by the Haj and

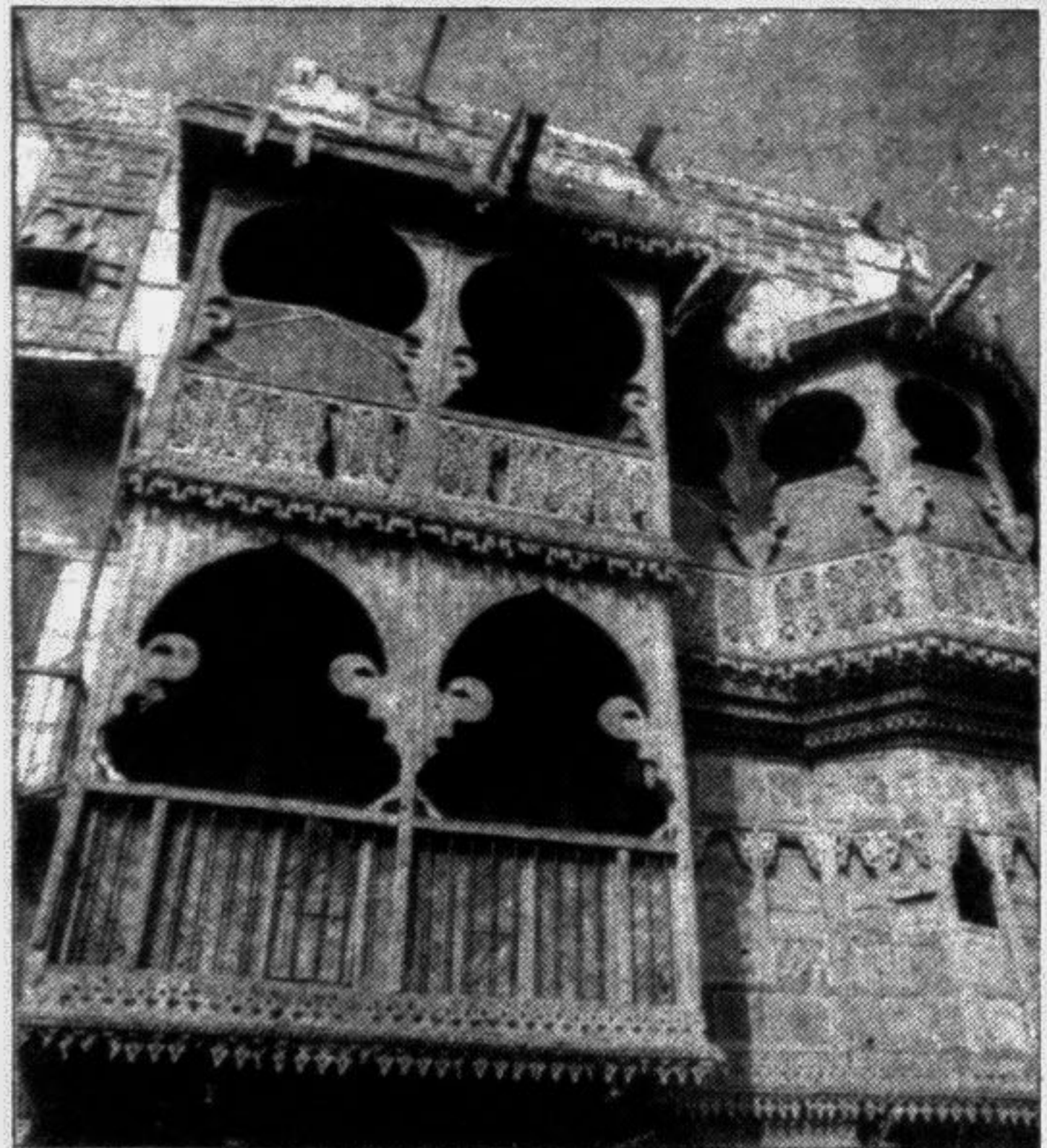


Photo courtesy - Saudia World

trading connections with other nations, such as Egypt.

The entrance is decorated by an arch, and the actual wooden door is carved. On the higher floors, windows and balconies are surrounded by heavily decorated screens.

In Southern Hijaz and Asir, buildings are constructed defensively. Houses are perched atop hills and built out of mud and stone. All mud constructions are fortified with slabs of stone. From a distance, the continuous line of stone houses looks like a fortified wall. Rectangular towers are standard. These have sloping walls, crenellations, and small openings.

The towns in the Arabian Gulf coast are situated between desert and water. The climate is hot and humid. The building material is coral and wood, plaster to smooth the walls, and palm thatching used in the roof. A variety of architecture is employed in this region.

Since both cooling and heating of rooms is important, according to the vagaries of the local climate, rooms are built for different purposes. The lower rooms in Qatif, for example, have small windows to keep the interior warm, whereas the higher floors have large wide windows to benefit from the sea-breeze. — Saudia

How Biman Fares in Customer Service

by Jinni

TAKING a rushed taxi ride to John F. Kennedy airport, I pulled two heavy suitcases and a bag to the Bangladesh Biman counter. The Biman personnel greeted me with a friendly smile.

"You're not flying today," he informed me. "Come back tomorrow."

The waiting lounge at West Wing terminal 2A was crowded with Biman passengers, none of whom had been informed of the flight's delay.

Biman opened its New York-Dhaka route only last year. Since then it has enjoyed some popularity, especially among local Bangladeshis who had previously opted to fly to London to catch the Gulf connection. Many discount offers, such as low Student Fares and Youth Excursion Fares, also make it a cheap option for the large number of young travellers in New York.

Passengers aren't limited to Bangladeshis New Yorkers. I saw Bangladeshis from Washington and other northeastern parts, and foreign nationals

bound for Amsterdam or Bombay, board the plane. Biman flies out of the Alitalia terminal at JFK two days a week, on Saturday and Tuesday. The flight stops in Amsterdam, Dubai and Bombay to refuel and change crew.

On the Tuesday that I was supposed to fly, the plane hadn't arrived in New York. Bad weather conditions in Amsterdam had forced the Biman to wait in London overnight. The crew planned to fly to Amsterdam and then New York as soon as conditions improved.

This was reasonable, except that none of the travel agencies or other passenger contacts had been informed. When I called my travel agency to reconfirm my flight, I was not informed of any problem. And when I tried to reach the Biman desk at JFK, I was unsuccessful.

But the Biman personnel were very cordial and offered hotel vouchers to out-of-town passengers. They also assured

us that we would fly out at 4 pm the next day, and upon request, provided a contact phone number for up-to-date flight information. The next day, however, the phone number proved to be false. After calling several information numbers, I finally reached a Biman representative. The flight was delayed again, because of more bad weather in Amsterdam and runway repair at Zia International Airport. Undoubtedly, Biman needs to improve its information services.

On board, it was easy to stow away luggage. A tip for future travellers, try the luggage compartments along the aisle. Passenger seating was not very smooth. Passengers had just occupied any seat they could find. The aisles were blocked as harried stewards pulled people to their assigned seats.

As soon as we were airborne, the flight attendant apologised for the flight delay, giving us the entire story for the first time. This was a nice

touch. Dinner arrived soon, and was excellent. In fact, meals were served very often. No sooner had we finished a meal and enjoyed some coffee, it was snack time. And soon after, we were having breakfast.

The entire flight was a sumptuous culinary experience.

I visited the bathroom as soon as the flight was steady, fearing from past experience that it would become unusable later. I need not have worried. The restrooms remained quite clean during the flight. Also, ground crew cleaned the airplane and restrooms everytime we stopped at an airport.

The flight carried several children, who were bored or restless. But not for long. Stewards and stewardesses stopped to speak to the children and their parents, satisfy their dietary whims, and produce a surprise toy. Biman flight attendants are without doubt the friendliest crew of all the airlines I have flown.

And Then They Built Your Home in the Air

A Report on The Aviation History of Biman

IN 1971, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) transferred all its aircrafts and other movable properties to West Pakistan, leaving behind some ground facilities at the badly damaged Tejgaon airport. PIA also left behind 755 high-spirited trained employees including pilots and aircraft engineers. These were the remains from which the national carrier Bangladesh Biman came into being. On January 4, 1972, Biman started operation with 2,300 employees and a single DC-3 plane donated by the Indian government. On its first flight, it flew from Dhaka to Sylhet.

Domestic air service in the country was pioneered by the

Ispahani family in 1946. The Orient Airways, flying between Rangoon and Dhaka, played a key role in local air transportation. In 1952, PIA was founded. In 1954, Orient Airways merged with PIA.

PIA operated only two flight routes in Bangladesh, between Dhaka and Chittagong, and Dhaka and Jessore. PIA also introduced Sikorsky helicopter services to Chittagong, Faridpur and Khulna to promote the local aviation industry. Operations were suspended following a helicopter crash in Faridpur in 1964.

In 1972, the Bangladesh Civil Aviation Authority was founded to implement national aviation regulations and build an international airlines network.

Bangladesh has maintained a high standard in following international aviation rules.

From a humble beginning with aircrafts donated by India, the Netherlands and Philippines, Biman has expanded to a decent size. But the corporation still faces problems. Biman is not run as a commercial organization. It is plagued by trade unionism and lack of leadership. Biman is the only airline in the world which operates in twenty-nine international and domestic routes with just five wide-bodied DC-10 airplanes. Shortage of carriers makes it difficult for Biman to maintain a reliable flight schedule.

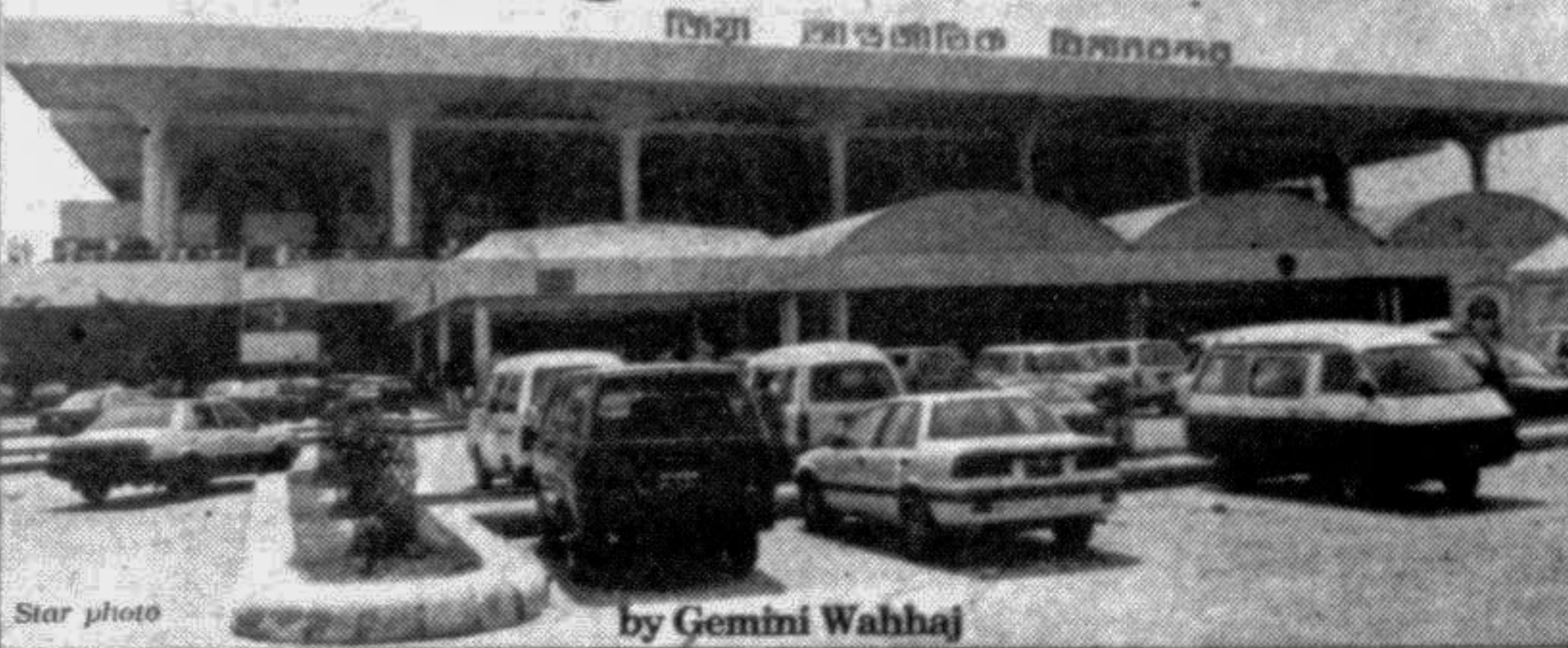
Biman faces stiff competition from other airlines with larger

fleets. KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, for example, which also services Dhaka, operates 90 carriers for its 155 destinations. Aviation is a capital intensive sector. Insufficient financial support has left Biman with outmoded facilities and equipment, making it difficult for the corporation to compete against the other airline.

Biman suffers from debts and liabilities totalling Taka 600 crore, annual expenditures in debt servicing, and acute over-staffing. Despite these problems, Biman claimed a net profit in the previous two years. The airline also handles fifty percent of all passenger and cargo traffic to Dhaka.

By Staff Correspondent

Does Facelift for ZIA Translate to Passenger Satisfaction?



Star photo

by Gemini Wahhaj

IN the next few months, Zia International Airport (ZIA) will expand cargo and passenger facilities, and recarpet its runway. All these plans are being carried out with great enthusiasm. But has the airport actually studied the root cause of passenger dissatisfaction, or tried to address any of the common customer concerns in its ambitious innovation plans?

Let us follow a passenger from disembarkation to his leaving the airport. The first problem is of course descending from the airplane itself. Anyone who has climbed down the stairs with two heavy bags might understand what a horrible experience it is for an elderly person. But the airport has already installed two boarding bridges and promises to open them to the public soon.

Passengers are then required to pass the disembarkation desk. The process

isn't very well-organized. But separate lines for foreign and national passports, as well as women and children, expedite passenger movement. So far our passenger feels relatively unharmed.

Next, baggage claim. Although most passengers express general discontent with baggage claim services, I have never experienced more than the ordinary discomfort necessary to collect one's luggage.

Also, introduction of the red and green channels for baggage clearance has removed the horrifying experience of waiting in line for hours for officials to look through every item in one's suitcase. Our passenger walks out through the green channel, smiling. So far, ZIA has tracked passenger concerns and addressed them adequately.

To reduce crowding of the airport facilities, ZIA has gradually eliminated visitor space

inside the airport. At the departure terminal, in particular, only the passenger is allowed entry into the airport building. Friends and family members are forced to say their good-byes standing outside amidst a jostling crowd.

At the arrivals terminal, visitors stand in two separate glassed-in booths on either side of the passenger walkway. As our passenger walks out, his receiver shall have to identify him in time, push her way through the visitors crowd and the doorway of the glass booth, to intercept our passenger in time. If all these events occur in perfect accordance, no problem.

However, if our passenger has walked past the glass booth without being identified, then what? He is now only ten feet away from the exit door. Once he steps outside, he shall be in the midst of the crowds that ZIA has so successfully

expelled from its premises. There is no chance of finding someone outside the airport building. On the other hand, there is no waiting area inside the airport. What if the passenger's transport home needs another hour to arrive at the airport?

Next scenario. Suppose our passenger needs to call someone. Then he shall have to leave his bags unattended near the exit, and reenter the glass booth (I know this, I had to do this myself). And if the passenger wishes to use a restroom while waiting, I don't know what the answer is. Unquestionably, the passenger is in extreme discomfort. Not only does he have nowhere to sit and wait, he has to maneuver himself through the crowds that the airport has eliminated.

The two major problems: visitors and passengers need a proper waiting area with phones and restrooms, and the crowds outside have to go somewhere. The simple solution would seem to be expansion of the airport building to accommodate all visitors and passengers in waiting areas inside the premises.

But general expansion will serve only to transfer the crowd problem outside the building to the interior, just what the airport officials fear. How about dividing the airport into separate terminals, according to different airlines?

Expansion would still be necessary, either vertical or horizontal, but the population would at least be segregated in an organized fashion. Also, additional disembarkation desks, baggage claim areas and baggage inspection spots will expedite the movement of passengers.

Packaging Thailand for the Tourist

by Zaki Wahhaj

THAI International offers tours in Thailand which are attractive to the average visitor. The range of places that one can visit is quite impressive - from the majestic Royal Palace to the awe-inspiring Crocodile Farm. The airline allows passengers to customize tours, while efficiently handling the bothersome details of travel arrangement. Tour length usually varies from half a day to eight days. We list below the ones that are most likely to interest tourists.

Two of Bangkok's biggest attractions are its Royal Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Since it takes just half a day to visit the sights, even transit passengers can enjoy the tour. The Royal Grand Palace holds world famous monuments such as the Golden Chedi, the Pantheon of Kings and the Towers of Nine Planets. Temple of the Emerald Buddha is the most sacred of Bangkok's thousand-plus temples.

The Pattaya Minibreak is a three day tour in paradise. Pat-

taya's beach resort has many modern hotels, some of which are set in typical Thai tropical garden surroundings with huge pools. There are also provisions for playing varied water-sports, tennis and golf. Tourists can visit off-shore coral islands, shop, and dine

at numerous exotic restaurants.

Thailand is also the home of numerous ancient cities. A four-day tour takes tourists to visit highlights of two of these historic sites, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya. On Day one, the tourists fly from Bangkok to

Sukhothai. On the second day, they explore the ancient city's impressive ruins of temples, monuments and chedis with the help of a guide. An overnight river cruise takes them to the Royal Summer Palace and gardens of Ayutthaya. On the final day, they take an early morning cruise boat back to Bangkok. Thai International



Photo courtesy - Thai

Mountain Trekking in Nepal: A Rising Trend

From Our Staff Correspondent

WHAT better place is there to climb mountains than in the land of the Everest? The most famous treks of Nepal are the Solu-Khumbu and the Thak Khola. But both treks are crowded with tourists and time-consuming. The Nagarjun is a simpler, shorter solution.

The Nagarjun ban, or forest, lies close to Kathmandu. The mountain is located in the middle of Her Majesty the Queen's game park. The

Nagarjun adventure starts with a forty-five minute bike ride to the lonely forest. From there, it is a two hour climb to the top of the Nagarjun mountain.

The view from the mountain top is breath-taking. On a clear day, you may see endless fronts of Nepal's hills, valleys, and cities. And behind it all, the white mountains of the Himalaya.

Start at the town of Balaju. A fifteen minute walk through the bazaar will take you to the

main gate. A sharp footpath on the right of the entrance begins the trail. The soil is red clay with frequent footmarks of past trekkers.

After an hour, the trail levels off. You shall pass through a path arched by leaves and emerge into a clearing. Down below in the forest, you shall see paddy fields. And above, the summit.

The trail is more gradual now, and interspersed with leafy domes. The path is still and cool, and rich with the

smells of many plants and flowers.

On the ridge, you may hear birds calling. Butterflies and small creatures nudge the visitor to welcome surprises. The summit is visible every now and then.

The summit is about 7,000 feet high. It consists of a Buddhist shrine, a resting house, and an observation tower. It is very quiet and peaceful here. The air is fresh, and the view is beautiful.