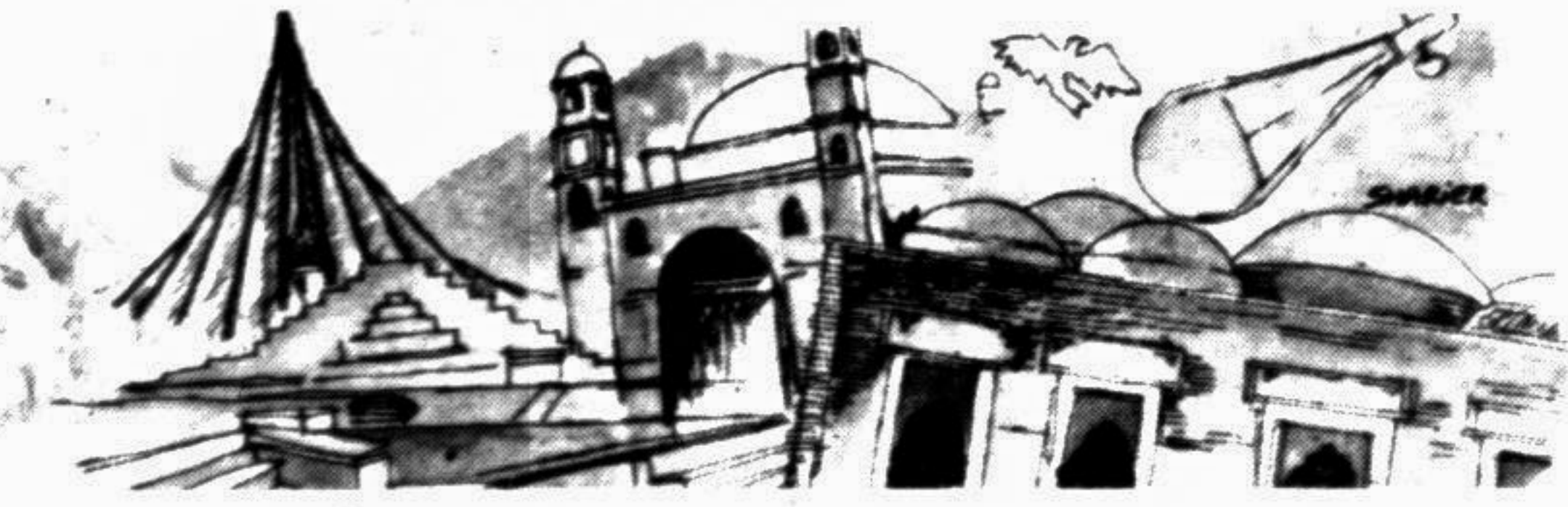


Travel & Tourism



Packaging Bangladesh for the Western Visitor

by Gemini Wahhaj

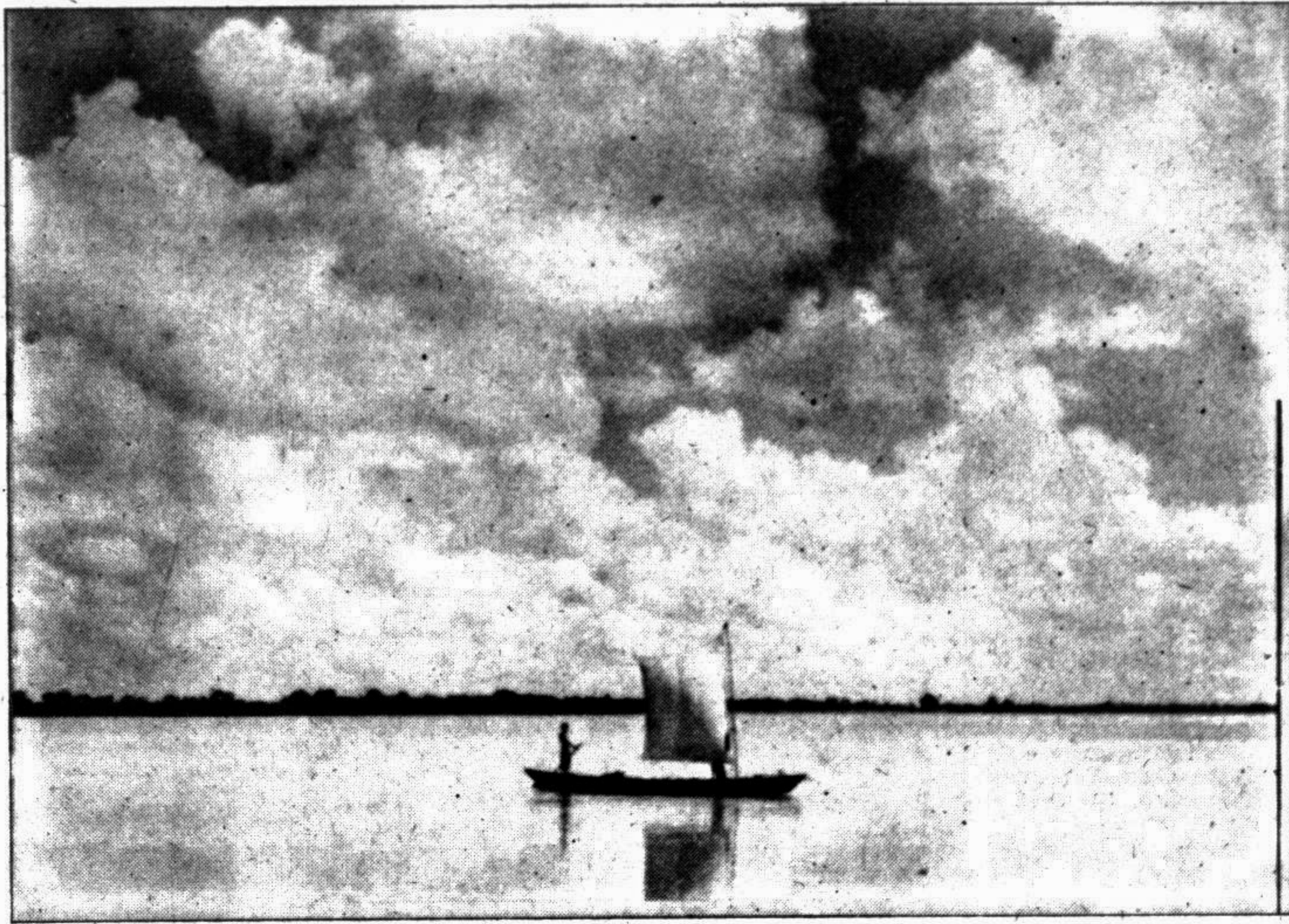
A Group Study Exchange Group from the Southeastern Rotarian district of North Carolina visited Dhaka recently. The four-member team included retired university professor Charlie Coffman, business credit manager Terry Landrigan, high school teacher Jerry Smith, and radio news director Steve Cohen. They described their impressions of Bangladesh from a month-long stay.

The five things that strike you, said the journalist, is the warmth and generosity of the people, the sustained beautiful weather (ideal for the beach), the density of population, the vastly different social system (for example, no dating), and the influence of government where there is none in the United States.

But Bangladesh is an indefinable experience. The country strikes the tourist in more ways than the tour operator ever intended. From a conversation with these four Americans, who were shown most of the country's top tourist sites, it was apparent that what the Western visitor carries away from Bangladesh is sometimes unpredictable.

The business manager said she felt as if she was in a Time Warp when she stepped out of the plane. Since that moment, she's been through a whirlwind of indefinable experiences and unforgettable sights. "Bangladeshis eat with their hands," she said, "they bathe from a bucket, and eat rice twice a day." The westerner has no frame of reference for the sights that greet him or her in Bangladesh. Every single detail, from the mode of transport (rickshaw), people's dress (sarees and lungis), way of shopping (bazaars) to even what we eat (rice and dal), is so foreign that it is a marketable experience in itself.

"So what do you think of the land itself?" The Daily Star asked. "Oh, the land is just beautiful," they said, describing the variety of landscape and way of living. As the plane flew into Dhaka, said one American, we could see the rice paddies,



shining like mirrors - the whole land shines. Another said, "you have no idea how many variations of palm trees there are until you see them." In the four weeks of their stay, the Americans travelled on all forms of vehicles - planes, boats (many kinds), rickshaws, scooters, traths - you name it.

The Economic complexion of the population is also striking, particularly the dichotomy between the haves and the have-nots. The business manager said she bought 3 taka items from the street side, and then 300 taka silk from a shop. Also, people prefer machine-woven products to hand-crafts. "People had a difficult time understanding what a credit manager was," she said.

The concept of buying or selling on credit is nonexistent, and the market is more cash based. Seeing the poor people of Bangladesh changed the American's perspective of poverty. Speaking in particular about the village people, the journalist said he changed his mind about what people need to survive. A poor person in America is very aware of what he doesn't have, but a Bangladeshi seems to do very well without a TV set or a car. People who are not well-off seem to be

more accepting of their fate. "One night, two of us were talking," said the journalist, "and we thought some of these people just wake up every morning, work the fields for their food, then go to sleep at night. There is nothing more to life. The next day we saw two people on the way to watch a movie at the Cinema and we thought: oh, so there is

more to life than just waking up and working the fields!"

The Americans could not comment on the prospects of Bangladesh as a tourist site, because they were closely escorted wherever they went. However, a German professor of French, English and German literature and geography who is also visiting Bangladesh for a month, provided some insights. He said Bangladesh is definitely worth visiting for the westerner, and one should stay for as long as a month, because there is enough to see. He travelled all over the country: from the North, to Sylhet, Chittagong, Dhaka, and Khulna. He follows the Lonely World Publication published in London and Sydney, which traces out tours of different countries. The volume of Bangladesh came out in 1993. The professor liked Sylhet, specially the guided tour of the tea gardens. He compared the Sylhet tea garden favorably to that in Dageleing. In Dhaka, he stayed in different hotels ranging from Taka 100 to Taka 1000, on purpose - to see all localities. He hated the noise pollution in Dhaka. "It would be criminal in any European city," he said. "A European needs some peace and quiet."

The professor travelled from city to city on buses, which were inconvenient when travelling with a huge backpack, and trains. He said the train service in the country is very good. Within Dhaka, he preferred to travel by rickshaw, because limited knowledge of Bangla makes it difficult to travel by bus. He cancelled a trip to the Sundarbans on a launch because of inadequate bathroom facilities on board.

At the time of the interview, the professor was travelling to Khulna by Rocket Steamer. He said it was a beautiful journey. Pointing to the small row-boats and multi-colored sailboats on the water, he said, "In Europe, one can no longer see these. Bangladesh has things that can no longer be found in Europe. It is as if the past has been preserved here."

Travel Briefs

SKAL Holds Monthly Meeting in City: The Dhaka-based SKAL holds its annual tea party meeting on January 31. The SKAL is a network of Hoteliers, travel agents, cargo agents, different airlines representatives and anyone else connected with the travel business. SKAL has an office room on the Sheraton premises. Members gather at the monthly meeting to discuss anything but talk shop. The SKAL in Dhaka is a fairly new organisation, about one year to one and a half years old. It is considering applying to the international SKAL for membership.

New Boeing 777 makes emergency landing: A new Boeing 777 jetliner on a test flight made a safe emergency landing Thursday after suddenly losing altitude. Four injuries were reported. The twin-engine jumbo jets are still in the midst of an extensive flight test program that began last June. The plane was flying at about 43,000 feet (12,900 metres) when it suddenly dropped. The pilot declared emergency landing and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) cleared traffic at King County's Boeing Field, in south Seattle. Two Boeing employees, a flight engineer and a flight analyst, were in stable condition at Harborview Medical Center. -UNP/31

Nepal's traditional dance dying: The cities of Kathmandu Valley that had flourished for centuries as living museums of Hindu and Buddhist art and architecture now seem headed towards slow but certain death. Lalitpur, a truly beautiful city, used to be called 'The Florence of South Asia'. These days, the city is losing not only its unique architectural heritage but also its rare dance and music. "Once the living heritage is lost, we will be left only with dead cities," says Anil Chitrakar, who heads the environmental management project (NEMP).

In 1993, NEMP gave Lalitpur a US 5,000-dollar grant to revive the Astramatrika dance, which used to be performed without fail each October during the Hindu festival called Dasain. Since 1990, the 400-year-old dance has not been performed here because of the lack of funds. In the ancient times, three localities in Lalitpur used to take turns to organise the dance festival. The cost of the costumes, jewellery and other props were met through the returns of the produce that came from communal land owned by trusts called Guthis.

In the early 1960s, the government took over the ownership of the Guthi lands thus putting an end to the supply of funds. However, until four years ago, private donors managed to pool enough resources to put up the Astramatrika dance. However, finding funds for the performance of the dance is not the only problem. Very few had been willing to take over the ageing dancers and musicians who had grown too old to hold performances. Many of the artists who painted the masks of the dancers have abandoned their brushes for more lucrative jobs. Now it remains for the youths to take over and they must be trained while the elderly dancers are still living. The first step to this is to make the younger generation interested. Many lament that Nepali music is being drowned out by the Hindi and western songs played incessantly on the radio and satellite TV. -IPS

American reduces fleet size: American has removed 93 jet aircrafts from its fleet since it began pulling out of unsuccessful markets last year. The airline will discontinue its non-stop service between Chicago and Munich, Germany. American had invested significantly since 1986 to make the route a success. -Monitor

Workshop on Wildlife Conservation held: A seminar on the development of wildlife conservation and management was held in the city's Forest Office at Mahakhali, recently. The inaugural session was attended by the minister and secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forest along with scientists and interested naturalists. Wildlife in Bangladesh is being subjected to extinction due to the speedy rise in human population, natural catastrophe and pollution. It is a valuable resource of our country and appropriate exploitation under proper management may open a new source for earning foreign exchange. With this objective in view, workplans and papers were submitted at the technical session; which was held after the tea break. These included plans for investigations and surveys for determining the population status, trends and breeding biology of reptiles, birds and mammals. The workplans were open for discussion and scrutiny by the scientists and conservationists present there. They came up with several proposals as to how to utilize the available scientific informations, to increase public awareness and to use the limited technology available in our country in order to meet our goal of conserving wildlife. The issue of breeding and conservation of crocodiles was given priority, although turtles, cranes, elephants and Bull frogs were also included in the discussion. The subject of shrimps also came up several times in the meeting.

SAS, Swissair to raise freight rates: Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) said it will increase freight rates to and from Scandinavia by 10 percent in 1995. SAS spokeswoman Lena Hoglund said the airline was losing airfreight market share because it did not have enough capacity. SAS planned to expand freight cooperation with Singapore Airline. -Monitor

Founding anniversary of Biman observed: The 23rd founding anniversary of Biman was observed on January 4. Biman, the national carrier of Bangladesh, had begun on January 4, 1972 soon after the independence of Bangladesh. A Milad Mahfil was held in Biman Bhaban. -Monitor

Indian Airlines to raise fares: Indian Airlines plans to increase their fares to offset losses it suffered last year when the country was quarantined because of an outbreak of plague. It plans to raise its fares by up to 20 percent from mid-January. The move aims to offset losses suffered between mid-September and November, when the airline was banned from flying 10 overseas routes because of outbreak of pneumonic plague in western India. -Monitor

BA starts International fare sale: British Airways recently started an off-season air fare sale on flights from the United States to London and beyond. The fares, which discount New York-London round trips 12 percent to 298 dollars, are subject to government approvals. Tickets must be bought by January 15 and March 24. Other restrictions include seven-day advance purchases and a Saturday night stay. Trips to the Middle East, Far East or Africa require a seven-day stay. -Monitor

Dragonair appoints new GM: Dragonair has appointed Ian Shiu as the new general manager, marketing and sales. Shiu will replace Robert Yih who after four years with Dragonair will return to Cathay Pacific from where he was originally seconded. Shiu, also formerly with Dragonair's sister airline Cathay Pacific, brings sixteen years' experience to the airline. -Monitor



Top: Today in the autumn dawn, Did I see your lovely form, O my mother Bengal, Your green limbs glowing in stainless beauty? The brimming river cannot flow. The fields can hold no more grain. The Doel calls, the Koel sings. In your woodland court - Rabindranath Tagore
Bottom Left: Men at work: pushing a cart - Bangladesh
Bottom Right: From left: Steve, Terry and Charlie, the leader. - Star photo



'Hanoi Hilton' Wall Tumbles To Make Way for Luxury Hotel

by Kathy Wilhelm
Associated Press Writer

HANOI, Nov 28 (UNB/AP): Workers have begun knocking down the wall of the 'Hanoi Hilton' prison, where US servicemen were shackled and tortured during the Vietnam War, in preparation for building a real hotel on the site.

One of the former POWs, retired Navy Capt. Cole Black, carried away a few souvenir bricks Sunday when he, his wife and other American tourists stopped at the site, a place of pilgrimage for returning veterans.

They peeked in the front gate at the cell blocks. Then they walked outside the mustard-yellow walls topped with barbed wire and broken glass to the rear, where workers with a backhoe and sledgehammers had opened a hole big enough for trucks to enter.

"They liked to put people in irons - medieval-type punishment," Black recalled later. "The treatment was very bad." The prison, whose real name is the Hoa Lo, was built by the colonial French government and held Vietnamese nationalists and Communists during the 1940s and 1950s.

After the United States began sending troops to prop up non-Communist South Vietnam against the Communist North, the prison became notorious for holding American POWs, who coined

after the United States and North Vietnam signed a peace accord.

"I had no special feelings about it," Cole said of seeing the prison where he was tortured. "I never really had a good look at it from outside. Any time I'd been taken in or out I'd been blindfolded."

Would he consider staying at the hotel that will go up on the site?

"I guess I would if the price is right," he said. "..... You can walk to many places from there. It would be a good place to stay."

Editor's Note: Jessore airport is a pleasant contrast to Dhaka's two airports. It's a single terminal, building located in a very suburban area, away from the all the traffic jam of the town. A countable number of passenger and visitor cars stand neatly parked on the premises. The airport receives Biman flights only, about 5-6 flights a day. The departure lounge downstairs is about 25x 15 ft long. Windows by the waiting seats open on a sunlit terrace. I was amazed that I could just walk up to the 3-person ticket counter and ask questions about the flight (and receive polite answers). An uncredulous Sonali Bank receives travel taxes. There is also a phone booth and a snacks bar selling coke, sprite, Gold Leaf cigarettes, Cadbury bars, mineral water, orange juice and other snacks.

The passengers themselves were wealthy-looking suited personalities. The Royal Hotel (of Khulna) was mentioned by several. Some were tourists,

NEW ORLEANS, Nov 20 (UNB/AP): Three tons of coins and an 18th century gold spoon designed to clear wax from ears are among the salvaged deep-sea treasures that go on display Monday along a Mississippi River wharf. The treasures are just part of the early haul from El Cazador, a brig-of-war that sank in a storm in the Gulf of Mexico 210 years ago, laden with nearly 19 tons of newly minted Spanish silver. Salvage workers made dozens of 300-foot (90-meter) dives as the gulf's hurricane season ended and its nasty

foreign and Bangla speaking, and a great number were businessmen on a routine trip. It occurred to me suddenly that most travellers opting to take a Tk. 655 flight rather than a 100 odd-taka 6 hour bus journey to Dhaka would have to be wealthy by definition. A large group of visitors from a nearby village climbed the stairs to the Arrivals lounge, just to see what it was like. Jessore airport is a local attraction, a place to check out for the natives. The flight was delayed by one hour, but a good selection of both English and Bangla magazines kept all occupied.

The most beautiful thing about Jessore Airport is the walkway to board the plane. You exit the building by the back doors and emerge onto a lawn - planted with dwarf trees, numerous shrubs and flowers, and garden lights. This lawn path leads to you directly to the airplane staircase. I have never seen anything like it, either in Bangladesh or abroad. GW

Three tons of coins, gold spoon salvaged from sunken ship

By Jannet McConnaughey
Associated Press Writer

winter approached, videotaping the wreckage and dredging up as much as possible to thwart modern-day pirates.

The wreckage found more than a year ago still holds tons upon tons of stacked coins sent from Vera Cruz in January 1784 to pay New Orleans' Spanish government and troops. When it went down, El Cazador was carrying 400,000 silver pesos and 50,000 pesos in smaller change - 18 3/4 tons of silver.

From the display on the wharf, the silver and other finds, some restored to their original luster, will go to a storage vault until a hearing before US District Judge Adrian Duplantier, who will determine the owner.

Among the artifacts are a couple chunks of stained glass; a spoon with a raised, flower-like design on the handle; rosary beads and a small scale with four weights shaped like chess pawns.

There's also a little set of nested measuring cups recently cleaned at the Alabama lab where two more tons of silver were sent. There are about a dozen cups, from thimble-sized to 2 inches (5 cms) high, each with a number stamped into the bottom. A hinged and latched top kept the set together.

John Johnson, founder and vice president of the diving company Oceanering Inc, didn't know what they were used to measure. Nor did historians called by The

Associated Press. One guessed they might have been used by the ship's druggist.

"There's also some pottery, some broken wine glasses, some combs - nitpickers," Johnson said. The fine-toothed combs used to clear nits, or lice, were not the only remainder of 18th century hygiene. A gold ear spoon also came to light.

Maritime salvage attorney David Paul Horan described it as long and flat - maybe a quarter-inch (60 mm) wide at the top, but nearly paper thin.

"They used the sharp end as a toothpick," Horan said. The other end is a very, very small spoon. They used it to clear the wax out of their ears."

The most unusual find was a breech-loading gun made of bronze, about 3 feet (1 meter) long and 3 1/2 inches (9 cms) in diameter.

Wrought-iron, breech-loading cannon were common in the 1500s but by the 1700s had generally been supplanted by muzzle-loading guns of bronze, said Corey Malcolm, an archaeologist at the Mel Fisher treasure museum in Florida.

Most of the coin comes up in stacks 3 to 4 inches (7.6 to 10 cms) high. They're kind of fused together, but you can break them apart. Johnson said in a phone interview from the salvage ship. They clean up quite nicely. The date and profile of Carlos III (king of Spain from 1759-88) is very prominent.