The Old Man and the Banyan Tree Travel

AST time I went there I met him under that mighty tree. He told me some fascinating tales relating to this great banyan tree. He told me its history - the all too important history of a two hundred and fifty year old tree.

"You know, you won't believe me but when you'll be back to see it over and over again you'll remember me at that time." he told me. I, for my part, didn't believe the better part of his story. For six and a half years I didn't return to see the old mighty banyan tree under which I met that mythic figure and his mythical Olympus mountain.

He told me that when he would die his fellow-villagers would bury him, beside or under this tree. This time didn't find him alive; his burial ground was nowhere near that old tree. They, the villagers were astonished to know that had known Jainal Ali Sirker. They told me that after his death the villagers were divided over where to bury him.

The big morol of Suitola and Mollickpur at long last decided that his remains would rest in peace beside the grave of his parents.-I felt a little sorry for him.

Actually. I wasn't back to see him. He might be a mythic figure, but I had returned to see that tree - the old banyan tree, supposedly the biggest and greatest in the world spanning over, twenty bighas of hand.

It has . forty major branches. The main branch was destroyed by lightning a long time ago. They say that the main one was twenty five

feet in width. Today only a few branches can match its ances-

In the middle of the tree. there is a big hole. Some uprooted stems lie idly looking at the sky. No one dares to touch them or carry them to use as firewood. They say that if you dare to take your hatchet to that tree, you'll soon find your hand paralysed for no particular reason. They even gave me some living example. Ramjan of Uttarpara (North hamlet). Hakim Molla of Mohorchand had a similar fate.

A few meters away from the tree, there is a new bungalow without any furnished room. It is enclosed by a big wall. I don't think any tourist could come here to stay a night or two without proper security. In an ambience of ancient setting. a newly built bungalow looks odd. On the right side, there is a bazaar, adjacent to the tree. On Sunday and Wednesday, Suitola-Mollickpur hat buzzes with activities. The inhabitants of nearby villages all come to buy and sell their usual neces-

Traditionally, the haat is, not so popular. You won't find any big shops at the bazaar. Only a few groceries and couple of tea stalls remain open from 9 am to 8 pm. Some straw made huts can be seen hundred meter away from the

Hardly anything other than the big old tree can stir your attention in that village of Ibn Batuta's time. Jainal Ali Sirker told me that no one lived here. two and a half centuries ago. Then the local Zamider forced a potter family to start living by Md Shafiqul Alam

He gave them the land. They planted a sapling of banyan. They were there for two generations. They had to leave the village when a marauding draught hit the region.

Forty years ago when Jainal Ali Sirker first came to live here for the rest of his life, a terrible lightning struck the tree and devastation of fire left a large hole in the middle of the tree. He told me that a kingdom of genies (unexpec-



Hinduism) used to be there with so many geniecal castles and forts on the top.

On realizing that they had been struck by their own living matter, they were persuaded by their philosopher- cumlawyer-cum-astrologer-cum-

king that they had better leave the place right away. They went to a new destination. Some of the villagers, mostly the pious ones at that time heard their moaning and crying.

JAS was at the same time living in the town of Kushtia. Having found that his new business and political friend had cheated him he thought that he would by any means leave the town as soon as possible.

One night he heard a strange female spirit requesting him to come to his own village to look after a tiny little country girl. It continued for several nights. On a holy good Friday he set foot for his country home leaving his everything in Kushtia for good. Soon arriving at his village Suitola-Mollickpur he discovered that the spirit that disturbed him was nothing but the soul of that tree. He found new enthusiasm to start his life

The tree revealed to him the truth of the art of living. it gave him wisdom. To him she became gaea (or mother): He took the job of telling everyone the story of that tree. His tree.

I tried hard to explore the myth that enshrouds the tree. I could not see its whole body at a time. It had grown a few meter on every side since the last time I had seen it. Maybe

to see its whole body together a person should think about a helicopter.

I found that no one was going to harm the tree. All were very much in love with the tree. It's an integral part of the villagers' day to day life, their gaea, their religion, their

kingdom of hope. There is no JAS but the new generation, has taken his role they all know her stories, her every in and out, every pros and cons, everything.

Recommendations for the **Dhakaite Traveller**

Take a Night shift of Dhaka to Magura or Dhaka to Jheniedah bound bus. You'll arrive at Magura or Kaligani early in the morning. If you stop at Magura, 'take the Magura to Jessore bound bus. There are busses available every half an hour. Stop at Shalika (Arpara).

Arriving at Shalika you have to take a van or rickshaw which will take you to Singrabazaar. There you'll find some Suitola-Mollickpur bound van. It's a gruelling two hours journey. from Magura to your destination. you can spend three to four hours there. Don't forget to to return early in the afternoon. The evening or night is not safe in this region, specially for a woman. better suggest you to reserve a autorickshaw for a day's trip. Winter is the most suitable

time to go. if you stop at laligani. Take Kałarbazaar to Suitola-Mollickpur route.

For Foreigner Don't go unless proper security in ensured.

US, UK airlines sign deal: The department of transportation has approved an application by Delta Airlines to offer services between seven US cities and London on flights made by Virgin Atlantic Airways of the United Kingdom. In this code sharing agreement announced Feb.2 Virgin will get an authority for additional flights between the US and London.

Trio of new commercial jets: A trio of new commercial jets will be appearing in considerable strength in the Asia-Pacific region over the next 18 months. These aircrafts claim greater efficiency, cost-effectiveness and operating flexibility than the classic "jumbo', though the 747's pre-emminence on high density long-haul routes will continue unchallenged for a long time yet.

The new. 300 plus 777 will enter service this year with British Airways. United Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines. Thai International etc.

World's tallest man joins PIA: The world's tallest man. Mr. M. Alam Channa, who has recently joined as sports officer, was formally presented a specially designed wheel chair By the managing director of PIA. Air Vice Marshall Farooq Umar, at a ceremony held at the PIA head Top Flight

Investment Budget for NY port: The port authority of New York and New Jersey has alloted US\$ 669 million in its budget for 1995 for capital improvements and US\$ 1.6 billion in operating expenses.

The authority's US\$ 2.69 billion budget, which includes no fare increases provides for major investments in its airports, tunnels, bridges, marine terminals and other facilities, said its chair woman Kathleen Donavan. Monitor

Dragonair's new schedule: Dragonair will be operating flights according to their new summer schedule which is effective from 29th March, 1995. The new timings are as follows:

KA 110. Tuesday Hongkong Dep: 1200 hrs. Dhaka Arr: 2255 hrs.

KA 111 Wednesday Dhaka Dep: 0120 hrs. Hongkong Arr: 0655 hrs.

This new schedule makes it possible for the passengers to catch same day connections beyond Hongkong. Dragonair has also introduced special business class fare

for DAC/HKG route during the summer schedule. Haij flight starts from April 13: The first Hajf-

flight of Biman for the pilgrims of this year under the government management, begins on April 13. The last flight to Jeddah will leave Dhaka on April 26. Hajj pilgrims are requested to report three days before their scheduled flights. Star Correspondent

STOL service begins: The long awaited STOL (short take off and landing) service is likely to begin soon. The authorities concerned have assured that the problems delaying its launching will soon be removed. The guidelines set for the STOL service came under scrutiny at a meeting between the Minister of state of Civil Aviation and Tourism and the PATOL (Provisional Air Transport Operating Licence) Star Correspondent holders.

Dragonair doubles flight frequency: Dragonair will introduce two additional weekly flights to the Japanese city of Sendai from April 3, 1995. The additional services will operate from Hongkong on Mondays and Thursdays. The services are subject to government approval

Fly KLM free in April '95: KLM offers the choice of three services a week every Monday. Thursday and Saturday from Dhaka with convenient connection to Middle East. Europe. USA and Canada, effective from 1st April '95.

All passengers holding locally purchased KLM tickets and travelling during April '95 will be entitled for a lucky draw and the winner will travel free. Every flight will have one winner, who will travel free

Best employee of January: The honor for Best Employee for the month January 1995, of Hotel Sonargaon, has been awarded to Stanislaus Rozario. Stanislaus holds the position of 2nd cook in the hotel's kitchen department. He joined the family of Sonargaon Pan Pacific Hotel in March Sonargaon Tattler

Travel Editor's Note

Oh, to See Dhaka Through Your Eyes!

"Ooh, the Ahsan Manzil is so pretty in pink," exclaims the glamorous ignorant tourist. "What a elever interior decora-

"Yeah," agrees the cynical guide, wondering if he should bother to explain the amazing history of the Nawabi palace.

A travel guide is someone any rich tourist would welcome as an add-on. Most international tourist sites teem with them - young college students, glamorous socialites (as pretentious as their tourists). or perhaps boring historians. cisions about what a particular see, feel, and absorb everytourist would like to see, can thing in your own way. make a tourist's day.

add-on, a guide is also very useful of course. Consider a foreigner in Bangladesh, with

guage, and no idea of how to get from here to there. Navigating your way around an unkown place may prove to be pretty nerve-wrecking, and take away from the pleasures of a trip. Most tourists back from France, for example, remember the rude French people and the difficulty in getting around more vividly

than the Eiffel tower. The travel guide is not a popular concept in Bangladesh. Only invited travel writers and foreign visitors get guided tours. Others are mostly left to They can change the whole their own devices. Of course. nature of a visit. A clever most people would argue that amusing anecdote, a beautiful the best way to see a place is delivery of the poetry of a on your own. You can only replace, or some intelligent de-, ally know a place when you

But still, most frustrated Besides being a glamorous tourists are ready for a travel guide , sooner or later. Bangladesh is teeming with people who'll make excellent no command of the Bangla lan- travel guides. We have our

share of Gulshan and Banani socialites 'who'd be only two willing to hobnob with a few foreigners. University students, the most romantic of all Bangladeshis, would be able to convey the magic of a tourist site to a foreigner.

Young people sometimes know exactly what experience would delight a visitor.

Would you like a boat ride with a singing sailor?" my cousin asked me once.

"How about a river cruise on the Buriganga?" "Let's drive to Savar in the

I'm sure most travel agen cies would be able to provide a tourist with a guide upon request. But it would be good for them to capitalise on the idea.

"Here's a map of Dhaka, a train ticket, your hotel booking, " an agency should say, "a here, take your pick of our tour guides!"

In and Around Bangkok Bangkok is the most popular destination of Bangladeshi tourists.

Nahid and Nishat Hussain tell us what to look for when you get there.

Palace is the National Museum

history and view rare artifacts.

Jim Thompson's House was

the home of the man who

popularized Thai silk throug-

hout the world - Jim Thom-

pson. This enchanting home is

perhaps the most beautiful

house in Bangkok. It is filled

Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and

China. The garden is an easis of

A major riverside landmark.

Wat Arun is a favourite with

temple by its English name.

various languages.

beauty and peace.

FTER an endless wait at immigration, dodg-I hing airport touts offe-ring a taxi ride into town or a pretty. The museum offers daily guided girl or boy - you may wonder if tours on Thai art and culture in it is all a mistake. The run in from the airport through traffic jams and pollution will not dispel those early misgivings rather it will add to them.

Bangkok is an ugly city sprawling over low-lying land. It has no obvious geographical center but it has a lot of heart. It is a friendly, vibrant place, and so, visitors quickly brush aside the hassles and ugliness. Bangkok was founded more

than two centuries ago on the the Temple of Dawn or Wat site now occupied by the Grand Arun is a magnificent shrine. It Palace, an array of temples and is decorated with glazed shrines which has been called ceramic pieces from top to "a dazzling fairy tale of dreams." bottom; as a result, the temple The Grand Palace is Bangkok's. literally shimmers in the sun. major landmark. Sightseeing is The most beautiful view of this easy here because most of the shrine is at sunset. popular attractions in Bangkok are located within easy reach of tourists, who like to call the

Inside the Grand Palace This tends to confuse most that hobody may photograph place! the green image made of

oldest temples.

complex is Thailand's most Thais because there is another famous and sacred Buddhist temple with a similar name. Shrine - The Temple of the Make sure where you are going Emerald Buddha. It is so sacred or you may end up in the wrong

Wat Benchamabophit is an unique temple located near Located near the Grand Chitrlada Palace, the official Palace, Wat Pho, known as the residence of the present Temple of the Reclining monarch and his family. The Buddha, is one of Thailand's temple is known as the Marble Temple because it is made A short walk from the Grand mostly from Correra Marble.



Bangkok, city of Buddhist temples

On the way back to Bangkok

- Swasdee

Wat Traimit or Temple of where one can study Thailand's the Golden Buddha contains a Buddha statue made from 5.5 tonnes of solid 18-carat gold.

Wat Saket or the Temple of the Golden Mount was built during the reign of king Rama and houses relics of lord Buddha. To reach the top you must climb 318 steps. But this arduous trip is worth it, because once you reach the top you'll have a panoramic view of with exquisite works of art from Bangkok.

> A popular attraction with both tourists and locals is the snake farm. If you are not the squeamish type, then drop by one early morning to see how the shake's venom is extracted and how the snakes are fed. It is a great opportunity to take some good photographs, so don't forget to bring your

> If there is one place you should definitely visit while in Bangkok, it is the Chatuchak Weekend Market. Here almost everything is sold under the

> The Rose Garden Country Resort is located only 30 km from Bangkok. This resort has large beautiful gardens, a hotel. as well as bungalows for rent, several restaurants and a Thai cultural show every afternoon.

> The Crocodile Farm and Zoo is nearby, housing the world's largest albino crocodile and other wild animals. The highlight is a wrestling match between a crocodile and a keeper.

There are many floating markets but the most colorful of all of these is the one a Damnoen Saduak, about 104 km southwest of Bangkok. The most favorable time for visiting these markets is early in the morning, preferably before nine o'clock. After that the place is too crowded. If you take time to explore this area you will find superb, delightful rural scenery

The world's tallest Buddhist monument is Phra Pathom Chedi which rises nearly 130 meters into the air. This is the site where Buddhism was introduced in Thailand about 2,300 years ago. The surrounding city is regarded as Thailand's oldest city.

The ancient city of Ayudttya is one of Thailand's most important historical landmarks. The city is located some 80 km north of Bangkok. The province is a treasure trove of evocative ruins of once magnificent palaces, temples and fortresses.

you can stop at the summer palace of Bang-Pa-in. It was here that an early king met and fell in love with a beautiful girl called 'In'. Who knows? You too may fall in love once you visit this beautiful place.

Japanese tourists arrive in Dhaka

by Nurur Rahman

ESPITE the expected warm spell, excitement in media over incidents occurred 14 years ago and politics over food shortage a Japanese tourist group happily concluded their visit to Bangladesh after a six day visit to Dhaka, Chittagong, Rangamati and Kaptai. The 14 member group consisted of students, businessmen, retired professionals and housewives Mr. Fuminori Haegawa, the 'liness of the trains' facilities.

tour organizer, expressed his satisfaction over the guided tour of the country. He said "Members of my group spoke highly of the entire tour. You can expect few more groups

Their return trip was planned by inter-city train from Chittagong. The team had thoroughly enjoyed the trip, their only common complaint was the poor state of clean-



The 14 member Japanese tourist group after their arrival at Zia International Airport, on March 19, 1995

- Nurur Rahman

rewarding experience a land of vivid colours and impressions. You see rivers and land - miles and miles of green land - and ancient traditional culture. Bangladesh is colourful. It is not vast, but it is various. The eye never tires of its beauty. The country is a spectacular assembly of woods, hills, sea'

ANGLADESH is a richly

welcome.

birds, beast and trees. The state is called "The People's Republic of Bangladesh". The people of Bangladesh are a friendly, fun-loving and handsome race, yet fiercely independent when challenged to defend their own values.

and flat land. It has its own

For hundreds of years the culture of Bangladesh has been subjected to waves of outside influence. The tide of conquest and trade which flowed back and forth over Asia through the centuries have each added to the sum total of religion, art, traditions which are within the mind and heart of every Bangladeshi or "Bangalee" as they call themselves.

Yet somehow the culture and character of Bangladesh is unique, unlike any of those which have influenced it. Almost larger than life in its pride, richness and vigour.

Nature has blessed Bangladesh with a lavishly generous soil and climate. Water and sun, the twin blessings of nature are here in abundance. The landscape is green and lush, the markets overflowing with brilliant and diverse produce - some things one will

recognise, some one may not. presents the opportunity to

Come See My Country

Sometime ago. Naseem Huq.compiled a wonderful foreign visitors guide to

Bangladesh. The Daily Star will run her articles serially. Any comments will be

ques and a wealth of art and culture, and to meet hospitable people, lively and exuberant who will be keen to make the visitor feel at home.

Bay of Bengal in the South. Bangladesh gained inde-

was known as East Pakistan. Villages are the smallest

are grouped together to form unions which are 4401 in number. A few unions together form an upazilla. There are 487 upazillas, 64 districts and 85650 villages in Bangladesh. For administrative purposes Bangladesh is divided into four parts. These part are called Divisions. Each division is made up of a number of districts. These respectively include the capital, Dhaka; the chief port and the second largest city. Chittagong, the second port, Khulna, and Rajshahi, the city famous for silk fabrics. Other major towns are: Mymensingh, Comilla and Syl-

To the traveller, Bangladesh see hauntingly beautiful mos-

With a total land area of approximately 1,44000km. Bangladesh is situated in South Asia. It is fenced by Assam (India) on the East: Burma in the South East; and West Bengal and Bihar (India) in the West: West Bengal and Assam (India) in the North; and the

pendence in 1971 after a nine month liberation war fought with Pakistan. From 1947 (during the time of Partition of Bengal) to 1971 the region that is now Bangladesh was the eastern part of Pakistan and

unit of local government. They

The population now numbers approximately 110 million, with a good number of the population engaged in agriculture. The national language is Bangla, though English is widely spoken and understood. The national religion of Bangladesh is Islam. 87% of the population are Muslims. The rest of the population freely practice their own religion - Christianity 0:3%, Hinduism 12.1% and Buddism

Seasons change. So does na ture, wearing a fresh look each time. The seasons of Bangladesh are divided into six, approximately two months for each season. They are the summer season (April-May) which is hot and humid. The rainy season (June-July) when the Monsoon sets in. The Autumn and Fall (August-November) harvesting time for the farmers, the Winter (December-January), extremely pleasant and the most beautiful season of all, of course, the Spring (Feb-March) comes in

with flower festivals all over. For many visitors, a major attraction in Bangladesh is the brilliant sunshine. It is tempting to laze beside your hotel pool for hours on end. But beware. The tropical sun can be unkind to the freshly arrived visitor.

When you are out and about, specially during the middle of the day, carry a hat or a parasol, and remember to take plenty of salt in your meals, to compensate the loss through perspiration.