



# Travel & Tourism



## The Chittagong War Cemetery

by Saifa Rashid

THE port town of Chittagong is situated on a series of hills, therefore, the roads incline downwards and upwards, seemingly without rhyme and reason. This makes the roads very exciting to travel along especially by rickshaw. There is always a sense of expectation because one never knows what surprise lies on top of a hill or just behind its peak. One such road is the road leading to be Chittagong Art College. As this road leaves the main thoroughfare it inclines downwards, then again ascends with a steep slope up to the Art College which is situated at the crest of the hill. However, halfway up the slope a multi-coloured, neatly tended garden can be seen on the left of the road which is separated from it only by a wire fence. From the road it has the appearance of a mystical world and as I gazed at it with as much longing as Alice had gazed at the Garden through the 4 inch high door in the book *Alice in Wonderland*. Luckily, this gate was not locked and it was not small either, so I entered the garden through a small gate which is guarded by a gatekeeper. This is the Chittagong War Cemetery.

The Chittagong War Cemetery contains the graves of all the soldiers, whatever their religion, who died fighting in this region in World War II.

The war cemetery is divided into portions, one is the gardens, the other is the War Cemetery proper.

After I entered the narrow gate a winding path led down the hillside, over a minuscule bridge to the enchanted garden I had viewed from the road. Not that the garden looked less appealing, close up. The flower beds were neatly tended and there were various types of flower blooming on each plant or bush. The flower beds only take up a small part of the garden. Most of the large gardens are planted with different types of trees that provide shade and coolness in the heat.

There are various paths meandering around the trees. Some of them are planted in a circle, surrounding a shallow depression in the ground. It seems to be a pool, but there is no water, only grass. And the grass! It is as smooth as a carpet of green velvet. Everything is spotlessly clear. In fact it does not seem to be a part of Bangladesh, at all.

The path through the flowerbeds leads to another gateway constructed in red brick. This is the gallery to the War Cemetery proper. There are no trees here. The cemetery consists of rows and rows of identical square tombstones, each with a copper nameplate bearing an engraving of the name, designation, age, religion and date of death of the soldier. Some are anonymous. They are the most moving and pathetic. In such an atmosphere one can only pay silent homage to these brave men. Indeed the fierce Guardsman who constantly patrol the graveyard do not allow anyone to do anything else. They do not allow anyone to deface the tanks, disturb the surroundings or to sit in the graveyard area. They also eyed my notebook with misgiving and forbidding so I decided to quit the premises of the cemetery before they removed me. I entered the gardens again in great relief.

There is no rule against sitting in the gardens. Indeed most trees did shelter a group of people or a couple. Mostly couples because the war cemetery is a popular dating spot. However, in the afternoon people come from all over the city to gain relief from the heat, dust and monotony of city life in the cool, green, natural environment. Apart from the Art College students visit the area frequently and it is common to see an artist sketching or painting in the gardens.

This year being the year of the 50th anniversary of the ending of World War II, the War Cemetery certainly deserves a visit, not only for its beauty but also to remind people of the atrocities of war.

## TOURISM-Expansion through Foreign Investment

TOURISM is growing at a rate of 9 per cent and is the single largest net foreign exchange earner for the country. Shortage of hotel accommodation in the country is a major bottleneck in promotion and development of tourism. Besides Hotels, there is also a hard felt need for development of tourism related services like travel and tour operating agencies, transportation and other services providing leisure, entertainment, convention facilities, etc.

The Hotel and Tourism related industry has now been declared as a high priority industry for foreign investment. It is now eligible for approval of direct investment up to 51% of foreign equity. Non-Resident Indian investment is allowed up to 100%.

With a view to improving technology, automatic approvals are now available for foreign technology agreements. In the hotel industry such approvals are available automatically subject to fulfillment of certain parameters: (a) Technical and Consultant Services; Lump sum fee not exceeding US\$200,000 (b) Franchising and Marketing/Publicity Support; Up to 3% of the gross room sales (c) Management Fees.

No permission is now required for hiring of foreign technicians.

5% interest subsidy is now available for hotels constructed in the travel circuits-cum-destinations identified for intensive development in the NAPT (National Action Plan for Tourism). During the last 2 years, Rs 2.85 crores have been released as interest subsidy for new hotel projects. In addition to interest subsidy available, a new scheme of capital subsidy has been introduced for Heritage Hotels. Under this scheme, a capital subsidy of Rs 5 lakhs or 10% of the cost, whichever is less, is available for development of any monument/structure over 75 years old into a Heritage Hotel.

Besides, tax exemptions available for foreign exchange earnings of the hotels, approved hotels functional between 1.4.1991 and 31.3.1995 are eligible for tax deduction of 30% of the profits and gains.

Hotels, travel agents, tour operators and other organisations connected with tourist trade are now covered under LERMS. Authorised dealers release foreign exchange for business visits, participation in Conferences, Seminars, training, etc. Prior approval of Department of Tourism is not necessary.

Hotels approved by the Department of Tourism, Government of India are entitled to import goods up to a value of 10% of foreign exchange earned by them during the preceding licensing years.

Customs duty on specified items has been reduced to the level as applicable to project imports provided the goods imported are required for initial setting up of the hotel or for substantial expansion of the hotel. Equipment for Adventure Sports can also be imported on a concessional rate of duty.

With India's new policies investment in hotels and tourism related industry has never been so attractive. The increased foreign equity participation, automatic approvals for investment and collaboration, liberalisation of import controls, easy procedures for investment, tax benefits and incentive present an excellent opportunity for investment.

With the liberalisation of the Indian economy foreign collaborations have been approved with renowned hotel chains such as M/s Holiday Inn Worldwide, Hyatt International KFC (A subsidiary of PepsiCo), Ramada International Inc, McDonald Corp., Radisson, Marriott, Avis Rent-a-Car, Sheraton International etc. Proposals for collaboration with Four Seasons Hotel Ltd of Canada for setting up hotels, with TGI Fridays for setting up restaurants and with Warner Bros for setting up entertainment centres are presently under consideration.

## Travel Briefs

**Gulf at Arab Travel Market:** Gulf Air is the main sponsor and the official carrier for the 1995 Arabian Travel Market (ATM), the regions foremost showcase for the travel and tourism industry. The four-day exhibition was held from April 25 to 28 in Bahrain Exhibition Centre.

A delegation from Gulf Air's senior management attended the ceremony and was present at the airline's stand throughout the exhibition.

At the first ever Arabian Travel Market, held in Dubai last year, 7255 visitors attended. At this year's event in Bahrain, more visitors attended with around 500 exhibitors from 30 countries.

— BD Shipping Times

**National Railway Board soon:** The situation for the Bangladesh Railway is unlikely to change for the better in the near future as the public management is the biggest failure in Bangladesh, observers say.

Unless the private management is inducted in the railway system, its service will hardly improve. It is high time that the government off-loads the shares of the railway for public subscription so the accountability can be enforced and also hard efforts are put in to operate it profitably.

Asian Development Bank has decided to extend financial assistance for overall reforms of Bangladesh Railway. The railway will be entrusted to a board to be named 'National Railway Board', with a Minister as the chairman and seven other members.

— BD Shipping Times

**PIA's Inaugural to Beirut:** After a lapse of 23 years, PIA resumed its operation to Beirut, the cosmopolitan capital of Lebanon. Initially PIA had started its flight to Beirut in mid fifties and continued till mid seventies. The escalation of a protracted civil war had terminated the service.

Recently PIA, with an assorted guest list of dignitaries, tour operators, travel agents mediemen and senior executives of commercial organizations resumed its weekly service to Beirut.

— Top Flight

**Emirates Holidays appoints Pacific World:** Emirates Holidays has appointed Pacific World, a leading Destination Management Company in Asia, as its ground operator in Singapore, Hong Kong and China. Pacific World already handles Emirates Holidays' passengers in Malaysia.

The appointment, effective May 1, 1995 is a strategic move to provide Emirates Holidays a single ground operator for its programmes to China and Malaysia.

— Holiday Aviator

**Gulf Air offers free stopover:** An opportunity to see Bahrain a rich Arabian tradition and culture with an exclusive modern architectural designs of a longest and highest 'Causeway' remarkably built over the sea connecting Dahrhan rank as the 'Eighth Wonders of the World.'

The free stopover package offered by Gulf will include a 72 hrs. visa, arrival and departure transfers, meet and assist service, one night accommodation, one city tour on the day of arrival. Free stopover facility can be confirmed while booking seats by collecting stopover vouchers.

— Tourism International

**Eight Asian airlines to cooperate:** Representatives of eight South Asian airlines agreed to cooperate in several areas of the aviation industry to provide a better service to customers. Air Lanka chairman Sepale Attigalle said: At the two-day meeting of airlines of countries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Air India, PIA, Royal Nepal Airlines, Biman, Air Maldives, Druk Air and Air Lanka were represented at the Colombo meeting.

— Tourism International

**Air passenger growth in Asia:** Airbus industry in its latest market forecast for the region said that Asia-Pacific airlines would become the world's largest region group in terms of seat capacity by 2014. The air passenger traffic in the region is to rise at an average annual rate of 6.5 per cent, with China growing at 8.8 per cent compared to a world average of 5.1 per cent.

— BD Shipping Times

**PIA celebrates 25 years to Philippines:** Pakistani International Airlines celebrated its 25 years of service to Philippines in Manila. Mr Salman Javed, General Manager, Tours Promotion, PIA commended the service of PIA's General Sales Agents in the Philippines, towards the growth of the carrier.

— Top Flight

**Continental announces Canadian schedule:** Continental announces it will begin flying four Canadian routes recently awarded in the new bilateral agreement between the US and Canada.

Effective 22 June, Continental will fly nonstop between Houston and Vancouver, one time daily; Houston and Toronto, one time daily; Newark and Vancouver, one time daily; and Newark and Montreal, two times daily.

— Holiday Aviator

**Radar at Zia Airport:** The parliamentary standing committee in its meeting held recently discussed the setting up of a radar at Zia International Airport (ZIA).

Presided over by State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, the meeting also discussed the recruitment rules of Biman Bangladesh Airlines. It also stressed the need for development of equipment for landing facilities at ZIA.

— BD Shipping Times

CHITTAGONG, the second largest city of Bangladesh and a busy international Sea port is an ideal vacation spot. Its green hills and forest, and broad sundry beaches always attract the holiday maker.

In the 7th century AD the Chinese traveller-poet, Huen Tsang described Chittagong as "a sleeping beauty emerging from mist and water." She was also given the title of "Proto Grandi" by the 16th century Portuguese seafarers. Even today these words hold good for Chittagong as it combines the busy hum of an active sea-port and the serene quietness of an

## Travelling through Chittagong City

by Ms Naseem Huq

the north-west of Chittagong city, the shrine of Sultan Bayazid Bostani attracts a large number of visitors and pilgrims. At the base of this shrine is a large tank (pond) with several hundred tortoises, many as old as a hundred year. It is said that these tortoises are the descendants of the evil spirits who were changed in to this shape because they incurred the wrath of the great saint who visited the place about a thousand years ago. On the compounds of this shrine

for them in order to win through the cases.

Besides, there are many other shrines in Chittagong city, including Baro Aulia (twelve saint), Gorbilla Shah and Mama-Bhagina Mazar.

**World War II Cemetery:** In a well preserved cemetery at a quiet and picturesque place within the city lie buried in eternal peace over 700 soldiers from Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, Burma, East and West Africa, the Netherlands and Japan who laid down their lives on the Burma front during the World War II. (More details in this weeks article on the war cemetery.)

**Foy's Lake:** About 8 km from Chittagong and set amidst picturesque surroundings in the Foy's Lake. There is also a small zoo there. This is an ideal spot for an outing or a picnic.

**Sitakund:** About 37 km from Chittagong is a place called Sitakund, served by a Railway station of the same name. This is a sacred spot for the Buddhist because of the famous, Chandranath Temple and the Buddha Temple, bearing a footprint of the Lord Buddha. Nearby there is a hot spring where Liva-Chaturdashi festival is held every year in February when thousands of pilgrims assemble for the celebration which last for ten days. Five kilometre to the north of Sitakund is the salt-water-spring known as Habanakhya.

**Court Buildings:** The Court Buildings of Chittagong are a sight to see. They are situated on the 'Fairy' hill from where you can get a magnificent panoramic view of the beautiful port city. This hill had been the scene of intense activity

during the liberation war in 1971.

**Mercantile Marine Academy at Jaldia:** The Mercantile Marine Academy at Jaldia is the only training institute for marines in Bangladesh. It is situated in a most picturesque site on the mouth of the River Karnaphuli, which has been a source of inspiration of many a poet.

**Patenga and Foucherhat Sea Beaches:** On many a hot

evening one can drive down to the Patenga or Foucherhat Sea Beach and enjoy the soft breeze brushing against their cheeks while watching the sun disappear into the horizon. On the way to Patenga Beach which is about 22 km from Chittagong city, one passes the Patenga Airport.

The Foucherhat Sea Beach is even quicker to get to. It is only 16 km from Chittagong. On the way to the Foucherhat Beach, and in the valley of the hills, one can also see the

Foucherhat Cadet College.

**Port Area:** The chief Sea port of the country is the Chittagong Port. It is located near the mouth of the River Karnaphuli and has a recorded history from the 9th century.

**Ethnological Museum:** Bangladesh is rich in heritage for its different tribal culture. The Ethnological Museum in Agrabad is interesting for someone who is looking for such ethnic culture.

**Chandanpura Mosque** located in Dewanbazar is an example of rare architectural design and enchanting beauty.



A view of Chittagong hill tracts, enchanted hill town.

Chittagong is the country's chief port and is the main site for the establishment of heavy, medium and light industries. Bangladesh's only steel mill and oil refinery are also located in Chittagong. This port city is connected with roads and rails with the rest of the country. Air link is available from Dhaka and Calcutta (India).

### Places of Interest

**Tomb of Sultan Bayazid Bostani:** Situated on a hillock in Nasirabad, about 6 km to

the shrine of Shah Amanat: The Shrine of Shah Amanat is another place of religious attraction. Located in the heart of the town, the shrine is visited by hundreds of followers everyday who pay homage to the memory of the saint. It is said that people going to fight law cases go to this shrine to pray

— Bangladesh/Ahmed & Ahmed



Foy's lake, Chittagong.

— Parjatan

## Travel Editor's Note

### Journey by Boat

The journey to Narayanganj should take only one hour or so, but usually it takes a lot more than that because of the prevailing traffic jam on the road to Narayanganj. It's best to start off early in the morning when the traffic is light. However, the times when we visited our friend in Narayan-

ganj, we could never make it till 2 pm, mostly due to delay by my lazy friends.

On the few occasions that we visited Narayanganj, we didn't do anything more than just sit in a room at our friend's place and watch movies or play cards to pass the time. Our friend never

took us to any interesting place in Narayanganj, but he compensated for all that by taking us on a boat ride at the end of the day. You can hire a boat for 30 Tk an hour.

The ride on the Shitalakkha river is most pleasant during the night, especially if there is a full moon. However we never had the opportunity to ride in the night because of the time embargo at home, but the journey during the evening has a different charm. People in colourful dresses are seen crossing the river on boats sitting on their luggage. The sight of them trying to balance themselves as an occasional barge passes by and leaves the boat rocking, is an interesting sight.

The thought of our immediate departure pains us. It is such a contrast to the cool and breezy boat ride! The stuffy interior of the bus is enough to suffocate you but I would gladly make it again and again just to enjoy the boat ride. —RM

— Bangladesh/Ahmed & Ahmed

## The Airline That Has Come Down to the Streets

Celestine Okonkwo writes from Lagos

IN the early, heady days of the oil bonanza, Nigeria was Mercedes country. Today, motorcycle taxis are a more appropriate status symbol.

When Paul Ikeje, a masters degree holder in microbiology, became a motorcycle taxi driver, many thought he had gone nuts.

Ikeje had lost his job as a polytechnic lecturer. "I will delve into a rare field to make some money before I decide what to do next," he affirmed.

His friends advised him to look for a better job befitting his status, but he would have none of it. Instead, he bought a rickety motorcycle and rode it himself for a fare of 50 kobo a drop.

That was 1986. He was one of the first. Today motorcycle taxis are a common sight in Nigerian cities, including Lagos and the new capital, Abuja.

The business has shown enormous growth, under various names which include Okada (after a private airline set up in the slipstream of Nigerian Airways). Going or simply Machine.

Oshikoya, who is 30, says that because of the popularity of motorcycles, purchase prices have shot up.

"In the days when motorcycles were not used for commercial transport a brand-new Honda 50 cost between N400 and N500," he recalls. "But today even imported second-hand bikes known as Tokunbo, of the same make, cost between N18,000 and N25,000, depending on their state."

Of about 2 million motorcycle taxis in Lagos, Honda 50s and Suzuki 60s account for at least half. Salesman Linus Anikakor says that in the last three months alone he sold more than 200 bikes.

"It is cheaper to purchase and maintain four bikes than buying a car or a taxi," he explains.

A second-hand car costs between N150,000 and N200,000. "To purchase the car is even easier and cheaper than maintaining and registering it," says 40-year-old taxicab owner Taiwo Akanbi. You are expected to paint

the cab, obtain the permit, road-worthiness and insurance certificates and driver's badge, and you are harassed on a daily basis by traffic policemen who must find one fault or the other in the cab," he complains.

To avoid such hassles, most would-be taxi operators opt for bikes as they are cheaper to maintain and attract less police attention.

Many passengers also prefer the bikes because they are faster and can easily serpent their way through the web of traffic congestion, especially in Lagos.

Says 30-year-old bank worker Michael Nwani: "The Okada takes you to your doorstep whereas the cabs only abandon you at the bus stop unless you are ready to pay their exorbitant and unsteady rates."

But Alhaji Situ Baba warns that the business "depends on luck to find a good and trustworthy rider who can handle your machine well and make reasonable returns. If you are

unlucky, you give your machine to a rogue who makes all the money but makes you pay for all the repairs and services."

Motorcycle taxis have the blessing of the government, which requires drivers and passengers to wear crash helmets. The directorate of employment in Enugu State has even purchased motorcycles and re-sells them to school-leavers on three-year loans.

But government approval and large profits do not reduce the physical risks. Danladi Idris of the traffic division of the Nigeria Police says that "the number of accidents recorded daily by Okada operators far outweigh their gains. Most of these accidents are fatal."

Idris attributes the number of accidents to a lack of regulation: "Unlike the car where the driver is expected to obtain a driver's licence, the Okada rider requires no such licence. He simply learns to ride a motorcycle and without experience or even knowledge of traffic rules he is on the

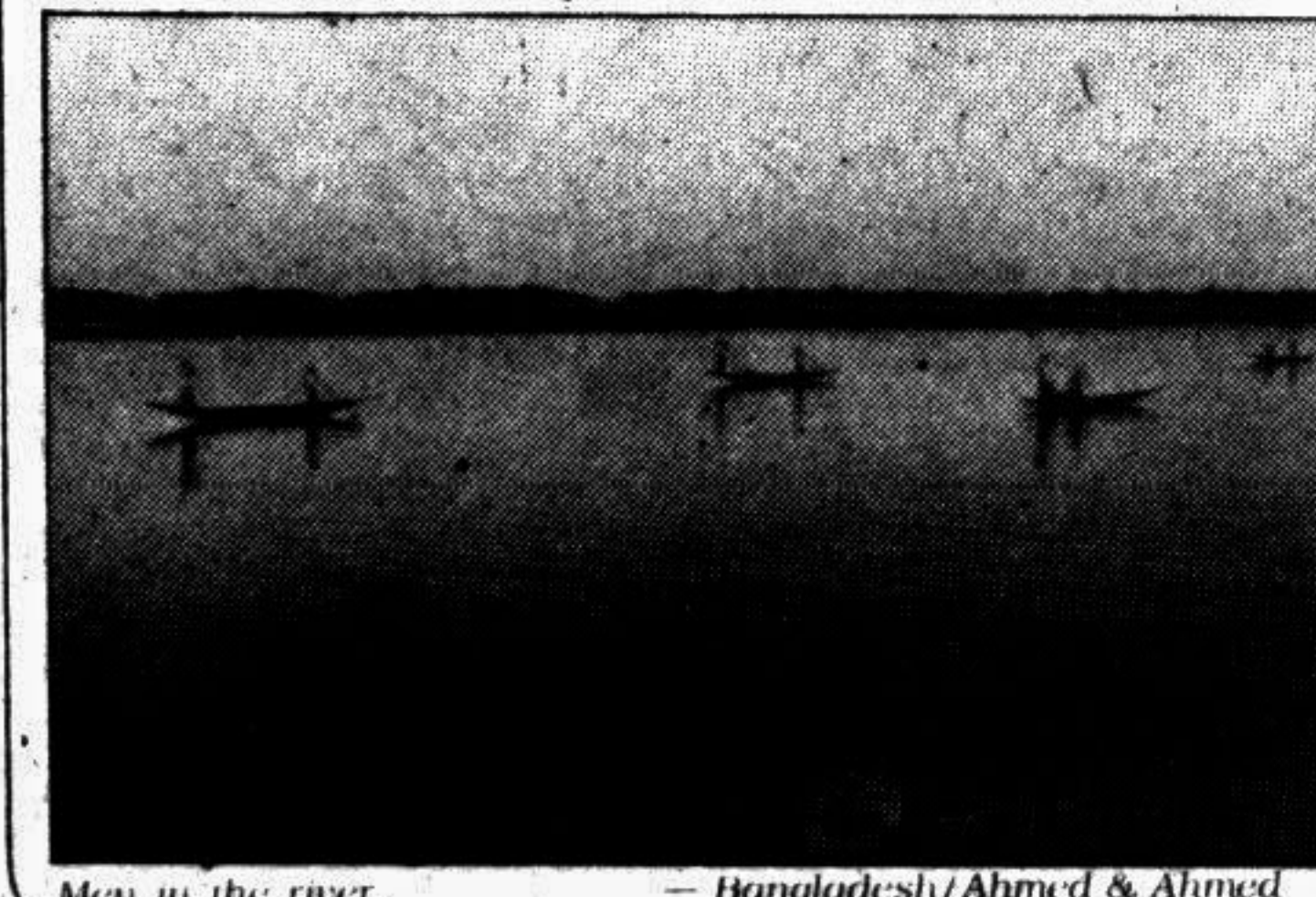
road, overtaking at random and obeying no traffic rules."

Okada operators blame other drivers. "Taxi drivers see us as rivals and block our way and even make us have accidents," says Gbenga Oshikoya.

If an Okada operator is involved in an accident with a car, colleagues will rush up in sympathy and abuse the car driver: "You want to show us you are a big man with a car and we the poor ones are riding on motorbikes." Passengers are aware of the dangers but have no alternative.

"It is faster, especially in Lagos, where traffic jams are daily increasing," says Juliet Jones who uses the Okada almost every day.

"What do you expect one to do when there are no buses, where taxis are very scarce and elitist and where the telephones do not work?" she asks. "Do you transact your business or attend to your daily need staying in one place or waiting for the buses that will never come? Look the Okadas are necessary evils."



Men in the taxi.

— Bangladesh/Ahmed & Ahmed