A Stroll Through The Sunderbans-2 Translet

Y forester friend was surely demoralised when he found out that I was not very happy with his work, as he had given all he could to ensure my comfort. There was then no time to search for an alternate place. I took a hurried meal and scrambled up on the machan hide with a forest guard named Shajahan, believed to be the most courageous man among the guards and boatmen. Nevertheless, the machan was a comfortable one which commanded an excellent view of the grassy clearing, and we settled there in silence for our night vigil. My comrade Shajahan carried an old markfour rifle and I carried a hand axe and a waterbottle along with torches. I didn't bring any food with me

as that may call in ants. After settling on the machan, I could see around as we still had atleast half of an hour of day light left. Several herds of deer were already in the meadow busy with fresh browsing. They had seen us climbing up on the machan and kept a respectable distance but I could count about forty-four heads of them of different age group and sex within my range of vision. I always have a mix feeling about these creatures. Among the two species, Chital is well distributed all over the Sunderban and particularly found abundant in seafacing jungles. The other species. the barking deer is a solitary creature and is found only in the northern boundary of the forest on two sides of the Pussur river.

Chitals, are the most weary animals of the jungle. they are blessed with most acute eye sight, hearing and sense of smell, but they have no defense against their natural predators other than their two swift pair of legs. I don't know wether the antier of the stags play any significant role in their defense against super predators like tigers. I could see and hear several groups of Chitals waiting in the edge of the woods suspecting some unseen danger. The sentinel of the herd, usually a doe stamps its frontleg on the ground and blows a high pitched sharp note. After the sentinel en-

sured complete safety, the whole herd came in the open grazing field.

On the northern edge of the meadow. I could see a red jungle fowl scratching on the forest ground for insects. As the sun gradually went down, the sky above us was

by Khasru Choudhury

birds are very alert creatures and their alarm call "Did you do it", is very reliable for all jungle animals. Their Bengali name is 'Hot ti ti'.

As the moon crept higher up all sounds around me

prefers to remain silent during these quiet moments in the still jungle. But, my companion Shajahan likes to talk about his brave deeds. He found in me a very interested audience of his courageous

from my machan. Nothing could be seen beyond this range and animals appeared as solid dark objects. Some of the deer came so close to my machan that I could hear them tear the grass. On the clear sky a group of flying foxes hovered around on the

best of sentinels in the jungle. They are very weary ani mals and try to be vocal at every suspected objects and scents.

During night adventure in jungles you can get help from lapwings in the grassy clearing, but in the dense woods you must depend on deer as other animals bother least about the approaching danger. The monkeys may scream in moon lit nights, or an owl may stop hooting, but this is not enough to warn you against any forthcoming danger. But in day time, the pied mynas and the black drongs are the most reliable caller while facing any danger. They not only scream at the predator but also help to locate its presence by hover ing on the site of approach ing danger. You can completely rely on these birds.

However, presently my companion started to snore in his sleep scaring grazing animals in our vicinity. Although none of the deer gave any alarm call but they were sufficiently nervous and kept a good distance started to feel helpless but didn't dare to wake him up as he might have started on his endless jungle stories, again. My mind was put to rest when I saw that after a few moments of nervousness, the deer started to graze again.

I gave up on any hope of concentrating on the sound of the jungle and instead started to use my eye sight to locate for animals. If you want to strain your eye sight there's no better way than searching for animals in the darkness of the forests. When you are looking close quarters then it's alright for your eyes, but when you have to watch further your have to widen your pupil more: and if you have to do this for a considerable time, your eye tissue will soon become tired. This may lead to blurred or

distorted vision. Another problem in full moon is the shadow casting of the foliage. The foliage casts a sharp shadow and makes it very difficult to distinguish an animal in the shaded zone. If the wind blows then the agitation of the shadow may seem to be an approaching predator.

Dragon Air starts HK-Subic flights: Hong Kong Dragon Air Ltd. an affiliate of Cathay Pacific . is planning to begin flights between Hong Kong and the Subic free port by next January.

A statement from the staterun Subic Bay Authority. which oversees the former US naval base, said an agreement was recently reached between free port chairman and Cathay Pacific managing editor. Dragon will start the flight three times a week within six months if it can secure approval from the Philippines Civil Aviation Board.

FMC charters Evergreen slots: Flora Mercante Grancolombiana(FMC). Colombia's national carrier, has signed a slot charter agreement with Evergreen of Taiwan. This will allow FMC to use space on the Caribbean feeder service operated by the Evergreen, which connects with

-Tourism International

its round-the-world service. The feeder links are offered on a weekly basis two 500-TEU and call at Cristobal, Cartagena, Curacao, Putero Cabello etc -BD Shipping Times

New BA general manager: Kevin Steele is the new British Airways (BA) general manager for South Asia, based in New Delhi. He succeeds Dan Brewin, who is moving to London as BA head of UK and Ireland sales. Steele was previously BA manager in Saudi Arabia. In his new position, he will be responsible for BA operation in India, Nepal and Srilanka. -Tourism International

Pakistan gives permission to foreign office:

The government in its Economic Coordination Council decision has allowed opening of branches in Pakistan of foreign shipping companies to undertake business and to make investments for improving the infrastructure in parts such as storage facilities and handling equipment etc.) says a press release issued in Dhaka.

The press release expressed the hope that Bangladesh Shipping Companies in having representation abroad, would be able to benefit from this decision and apply to the Ministry of Communication, Government of Pakistan for opening branch offices their. -BD Shipping Times

Pan Pacific establish HQ in Singapore: Singapore-Pan Pacific Hotels and Resorts, a hotel management company, specializing in the Pacific rim has relocated its corporate headquarters from Costa Mesa, California to Singapore, recently.

The relocation of the company's headquarters is part of Pan Pacific's goals of expansion. According to the president of Pan Pacific, Ichigo Umehara, " With its excellent communication system and airline connection to the rest of the world. Singapore is an ideal location for the headquar-

In addition, a regional office will be based in San Fransisco to oversee operations of the company's North American hotels and sales office in the West Coast and in New York. Tourism International

All Trans opens Banani office: All Trans Cargo Services Ltd has opened a secondary office in Kemal Ataturk Avenue, Banani for convenience of the clients. The company's other office is located in Motijheel, Dhaka. -BD Shipping Times

BA to bring first class: British Airways is bringing individual cabins for first class passengers starting next October, a luxury that disappeared from airlines 30 years ago. British Airways hopes that this will bring back some of the lucrative trade it lost in recent years to its competi-



A lonely deer in the wilderness

suddenly streamed by a huge flock of screaming jungle

crow in a note different from their tame cousins. The sharp and high-pitched note of the nightjars startled in us a strong jungle feeling. Also the geco lizard had begun its evening incantation; Tok-key, Tok-key! it went on. The cicadas had also joined in the jungle concert.

see five or six red watled lapwing busy in selecting their night haltage merely two hundred yards from my machan. These territorial

ceased except the continuous booming sound of the rushing mynah, heading towards a waves, which suggested that high tide was on its way. Jungle fowls began to Stillness in the wilderness sometimes become unbearable to human beings.

The transition time between day and night is very interesting feature in wild areas, as day-active animals retreats for their night shelter and the night-active animals prawl for their nocturnal activity. Most of the ani-Looking straight I could mals who prey on living creature in sight active. Their prey species pass a weary time during these transition

hours, for their lives. Most living creatures

actions. His vast experience with jungle creatures provided him with lot of stories to tell. But at a time like that not even the world's most interested listener could patiently listen to any stories. as the sound would betray our camouflage.I tried to explain to him that it was important to remain silent, but it did not seem to have any effect on him. So, with sheer frustration I told him to go to

sleep. As silence fell again I started to look around me and could distinguish the grazing animals like pigs and deer by their shape, upto about two hundred metres

their delicate skinny wings. On my left a lone bird kept calling continuously. Its call resembled the tree pie; kikkring. kik-kring. I had heard them on other occasions in different places, specially

during fullmoon.

- The Vanishing Jungle

Also I could hear the hooting of an owl, but I was unable to locate it as it is difficult to identify the source when the volume of the note is high and pitch is so low. On my left I heard some distant alarm call of a female deer, but it did not persist for long, so I safely concluded that there was nothing to fear.I knew from experience that deer were not always the

To be continued

Kathmandu Fact File

Where to Stay

HERE is no shortage of world class hotels in Kathmandu like the Annapurna and Yak & Yeti in Durbar Marg, the Shangri-La in Lazimpat, the Holiday Inn at Tahachal and the Everest

tered taxis (with black registration plates) ranging from old Toyota Corollas to modern luxury saloons. The more adventurous can try the three rickshaws. Buses are to be avoided unless you enjoy be- \$2.

star hotels. The tourist area in Thamel offers scores of excellent restaurants whose prices have hardly increased wheeler tempos or bicycle since the 1970's! Try their fixed breakfasts from under

performing incredible body contortions, devotees submerging themselves in the holy Bagmati river, monkeys ready to steal your snacks and bodies being cremated at the ghats. Alternatively you may want to come face to



Visitors in Nepal

in New Baneshwor. The ing packed in like a sardine excellent Hotel Vaira behind Swayambhunath and Dw- to someone's pet goat! Moarika's Kathmandu Village in torbikes are cheap to hire Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel still remains a favourite with world travellers. Also in Thamel, the more budget minded can find an abundance of lodges with names like Yeti Cottage and Yak. Lodge all offering basic accommodation from around

Getting Around

There are plenty of me-

Battisputali are more of a and private cars can be hired cultural experience while the with a chauffeur (contact any travel agent or hotel). The cheapest and best way to get around the city and valley is to hire a bicycle-be it an Indian 'Hero' or a foreign BMX. **Eat Your Heart Our**

and don't mind sitting next

French, Japanese, Thai, Russian, Italian, Mexican, Tibetan-Kathmandu is a diner's paradise. Up market restaurants can be found in the Durbar Marg area and fivePlaces to Visit

Kathmandu is jam packed with fascinating places. Visiting the Buddhist stupas of Swayambhunath and Boudnath is an experience in itself while the National Museum in Chaunni, the Tribhuban Museum in Hanuman Dhoka and the Natural History Museum behind Swayambhunath offer fascinating insights into Nepal's history, people and

Pashupatinath is one of the most important pilgrimage sights in Asia. Here you'll and ashen covered Sadhus

face with the world's only Living Goddess. You may visit- but not photograph the Royal Kumari who resides in a palace within the Hanuman Dhoka complex.

Photos courtesy to Sabrina Nigar and Rahat Nigar

Balaju Botanical Gardens and Jawalakher Zoo are also worth a visit particularly as the latter is close to the Tibetan Refugee Camp where you can buy Tibetan handicrafts. For short sightseeing trips or longer journeys, contact any one of the hundreds of Travel Agents that have mushroomed in the city.

Tourists Pour Across the River Jordan TO room at the inn -

that expression had its origins in the Middle East, but its current significant in Jordan is threatening to put the brakes on one of the most significant economic spin-offs of that country's peace treaty with Israel.

When the peace treaty was signed last October, Jordanians began looking forward to an economic resurgence, with the tourism industry at the forefront. Visitors drawn by the country's many historical and biblical sites, and reassured by the new era of political stability, have started pouring in.

But the country's tourism infrastructure is battling to cope. And that has forced tourist industry leaders and government officials to act decisively.

There is no doubting that the tourist boom is real. Minister of Tourism Abdul llah Khatib reported that arrivals to the kingdom during the first third of the year were 40 per cent higher than for the same period in 1994.

The increase is generally attributed to the "Israeli invasion". Droves of both Arab and Jewish Israelis arrive daily. It is estimated that 52,000 Israelis travelling on Israeli passports visited Jordan during the first half of this year, while the number arriving on other passports pushes this figure still higher. Travel agents report that

Jordan has also become attractive to other important tourist markets. North American tourism has grown by 82 per cent over last year, while the European market has increased by 41 per cent.

That is the good news. But local tour operators say that without major investment. this boom will turn bust.

This year's high season began in mid-March, and from the outset tour operators have been scrambling to secure rooms and transportation for large tour groups. Amman's four fivestar hotels have been operat**Amy Henderson writes from Amman**

tors.

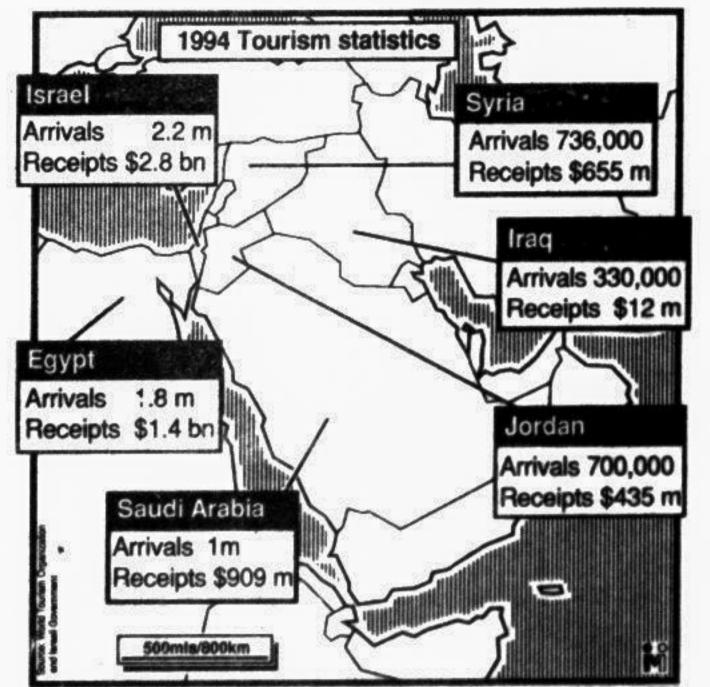
ing at 90 to 95 per cent occupancy since April and managers expect that to continue. Jordan currently has only 8,680 hotel rooms. Tour operators and the Ministry of Tourism believe that needs to

be doubled — and soon. Until recently, Jordan's only tourist bus company was the Jordan Express Tourist Transport Company (JETT) Earlier this spring, the cabinet ended JETT's 20-year monopoly because the company could not meet demand.

Travel agents say confusion reigned during the first half of this season. Hotel reservations were not fill a tourist's itinerary for a week. Yet, the average stay of tourists in Jordan, say the ministry, is only four days. In neighbouring Israel, the average stay is 10 to 14 days.

"If tourists decided to stay, where would we put them all and how would we move them around the kingdom?" asks George Bawab, proprietor of Jordan's largest tour agency. "We can only keep them here if we have places for them to stay."

For decades, tourism was largely ignored by the Jordanian government even though it constitutes about 12 per cent of its Gross



honoured at the 11th hour and buses broke down. Tour operators say they have turned groups away this year "If we keep turning peo-

ple away." said one, especially from our traditional markets, or if people keep having bad experiences in Jordan, they just won't come back. We can't afford to keep on like this.

The country's historical and Biblical sites - many of them undeveloped — could

National Product. But the peace agreement and an International Monetary Fund economic reform programme calling mainly for privatisation has spurred the government into action.

Despite outcries from four operators that capital needs for new bus companies were prohibitive - 10 million Jordanian dinar for a minimum fleet of 50 large passenger buses - the end of April saw one new company

established by some of Amman's major hoteliers and two more in May.

-Tourism International

There are plenty of other lucrative opportunities. The 20-kilometre, mostly undeveloped Dead Sea shoreline has only two hotels. By contrast, the western shoreline, on the Israeli side, boasts dozens of health spas attracting tens of thousands of visitors each year.

In addition to priority zones like this, the government is keen on attracting investment to expand the small airport at the Red Sea resort city of Agaba - another major tourist destina-

Expected features include 100 per cent ownership for foreign companies, land sales to foreigners and tax holidays for between seven and 12

Even without these incentives, the first investors have already made moves. Frenchowned ACCOR, one of Europe's largest hotel and travel groups, has teamed up with a local contracting company and plans to spend \$55 million on hotels in Amman, Agaba, Petra and the Dead Sea. ACCOR is also building a chain of hotels in Israel.

lmex International from the United States plans to build a \$3.5 million health spa complex at the Dead Sea, beginning in January.

Jordanian investors have also begun making moves New hotels are planned in Amman and in the priority tourist zones. These, says the Tourism Ministry, will add 1,500 new rooms within a

All this growth is not just seen as a bid to make tourists happy. Jobs are being created and foreign exchange generated. And economic stability. many believe, is the best possible way of making sure that the region's fragile peace holds. — GEMINI NEWS

AMY HENDERSON is a staff reporter on the "Jordan Times.