



Rangamati: The Wondrous Lake

by Nafees A. Imtiazuddin

I have not been to paradise so I cannot compare it with Rangamati. I can only try to describe it, though words can hardly paint the picture that is Rangamati.

The natural beauty starts from the moment you enter the hills and make your way up the winding road for 77 kilometres. The hills are not too high, but peer over the edge of a road and you know it is high enough. The road has mostly been cut out from the hillside leaving a winding red scar around the hills, except where nature has stepped in and healed it with her bounty of moss, grass and shrubs. Where the edge of the road falls away into the

ravines, the sight is confounded by an array of elephant grass, bamboo, shrubs and undergrowth, ready to spring an elephant or deer, and, the denser parts, you may even conjure up a tiger. Labouring up from the last valley and village your sight wanders into the distance where the dark green hills rest their heads against a hazy blue sky with wisps of clouds teasing the peaks.

Suddenly comes that breathless turn, and there spread in front is the magical expanse of water stretching as far as your gaze will go and finally letting up against a distant row of hazy hills that can only be a dream. The gasping beauty is suddenly all

around, bathed in blue reflections, on the shining silvery waters vying with the shades of green that pour forth. As you go farther into this silver green fable you know it is all a dream. But the illusion lasts. It takes you to a very real motel where the brick and cement of a drab building is an impolite intrusion. Climb upstairs and look out in front. A little garden leads down to where the lake has obligingly appeared to meet your gaze. Across the little stretch of water, nature has painted in innumerable shades of green and emerald, a row of hills. The view from the back balcony leaves you clutching hard on the rails. The sheer magnificence of

the vast expanse of water overwhelms you into silence, and the lapping of the water licking the edge of hill beneath, the only sound.

Run down a little winding way to the Boat Club. Out on the lake on a speedboat, with the bow rising high your heart racing with the wind and spray in your face you discover the joy of living. You rejoice in the ecstatic beauty of waves chasing waves, in every direction, breaking into million of shimmering crystals in the laughing rays of the sun. This is the Rangamati lake, a 265 square mile wonder created by man and decorated by nature. Some where out there in the lake you peer down into the water

and feel an eerie shadow waiting in the depths—the remains of the Raja's Palace. The shadow, however, is soon washed away by the flowing waters of larger human interests.

Cruising past the market place is an exotic experience. Hundreds of river craft of different sizes and shapes from graceful to grotesque, crowd the ghat (dock). The ghat itself is another piece of interest, rising sharply from the lake with bamboo and split logs dug in for steps. From the distance it looks almost like a vertical railroad. The most graceful boat here is the sampan. The sharply upturned bow curving inwards, and the proudly



Walking along the suspension bridge is a rewarding experience

by Mostafa Kamal

On a moonlit night, the lake is transformed into a world made of the fabric of dreams.

arched points of the stern give it a stately look.

On a moonlit night, the lake is transformed into a world made of the fabric of dreams. Lie back in a stately sampan, swayed by the soft melody of rippling waters, while the moon is smiling in the heavens surrounded by all her stary fairies, and lose ourselves in a divinely blue sky where the clouds float by for the poet's eyes. The tranquil beauty of the world around enchants the mind.

Nature seems to lose herself in raptures over her own breathtaking beauty, in the endless mirror of the heavens, with the wind playing the flute and the lush green forests whispering eternally to the breeze.

The philosophically serene tapestry that is loving in its soft grace, is stunning in its violent fury. When the rising waves and raging

winds send streaks of lightning through a heart awed into admiration by the majesty of the darkly thundering clouds, it is still a sight to be felt. And you know, if there were dreams to sell, this is what you would buy.

How to get there: From Dhaka you can get to Rangamati via Chittagong. There are several daily flights to Chittagong from Dhaka. You can also go to Chittagong by train, a five hour trip in the Inter-City or take an air conditioned bus almost any time of the day. The last bus leaves Dhaka around 10 pm and arrives in Chittagong in about four hours. In Chittagong, you can easily rent a sedan or a micro bus to get to Rangamati. Cars can also be rented from the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Motel Shaikat. The drive up the hills takes about two hours.

Approximate fares (Dhaka-Chittagong-Dhaka)
By air: US \$ 50
By bus or train: US \$ 30
Car rental from Chittagong to Rangamati costs approximately US \$ 25.

The Lake: Approximately 50 miles from Chittagong, right in the heart of the Hill Tracts.

The Forest: Mainly teak. Endless variety of flora and fauna. Exciting variety of wildlife including leopards, sambur, deer and elephants.

Where to Stay: Ideally located, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Motel has both air conditioned and non air-conditioned rooms. Tariffs are economical and the food is good.

Where to go: Boating on the lake in a speedboat or on a sampan is very refreshing. A short visit to the raja's mansion takes only about an hour and a half. There is also a very large Golden Buddha at the Rajbari. In Rangamati itself, a visit to the Bazaar and ghat is a must. A short visit to the DC's Bungalow area is also quite nice.

Colourful and attractive tribal music and dances are the main features, walking across a suspension bridge connecting two hill tops near the motel is a lovely experience. The best overall view of the lake is from a hilltop behind

the motel. Fishing is good and water skiing is fun. Hiking, though not difficult is wonderful experience.

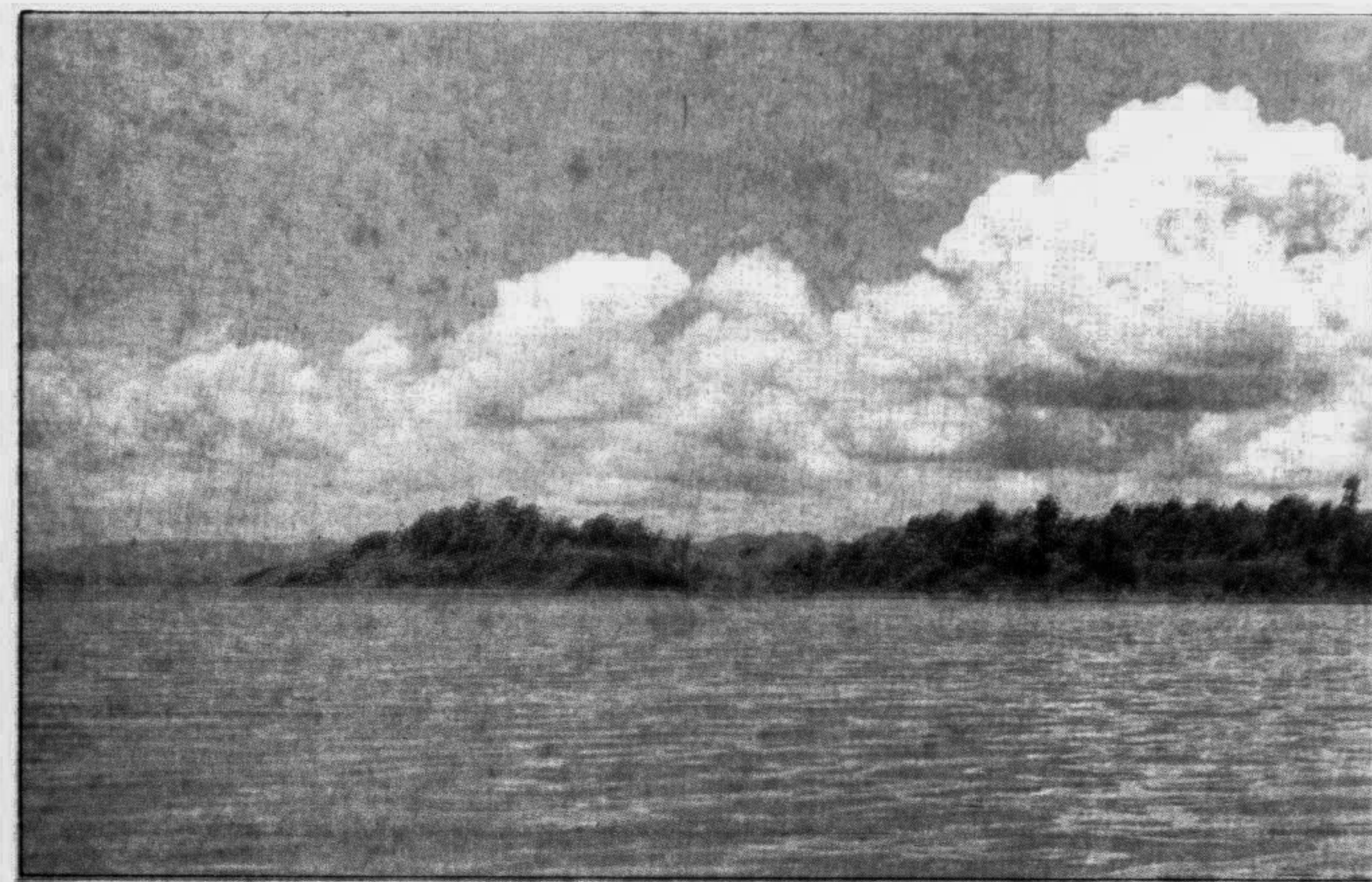
Shopping: Local fabrics especially homespun textiles, hand-woven bed covers, shawls, table spreads and silver are available at the main market. For a closer look at how these intricate fabrics are hand produced, look for Kalpotoru, the tribal handicraft centre by BSCICM, which also produces a large variety of straw, textile and leather goods.

Climate: Cool (12°C-18°C) in November, December and January. Warm (30°C-34°C) in April, May and June. Breezy with cool showers in July, August and September.

Tribal life: The natives belonging to the Chakma and Murong tribes are very colourful people who have their own exotic culture.

Remember: Wandering about in the jungles, alone or at night, or going boating beyond sight of the motel is not advised.

Source-Digonto (July-Sept. 1995)



The Rangamati Lake: A magical expanse of water

—photo by Mostafa Kamal

Population Growth, Faulty Policies Threaten Indian Wildlife

A total of 81 species of animals, 38 birds, 18 types of amphibians and reptiles are on the extinction list in India.

INDIA'S national parks, covering thousands of acres of forests and countless birds and animals, are facing ruin mainly due to the connivance between greedy politician and unscrupulous businessmen.

The situation is made worse by the nonchalant attitude of state governments, which are often in league with mining and other business interests.

The environment minister who has been boasting about India's enormous gene pool and countless animals, appears powerless to check the systematic disintegration of national parks through faulty policies of the state governments.

The apparent inability of the environment minister to counter defective state policies, together with the coun-

try's increasing population and unchecked pollution, is threatening to wipe out soon almost one-fourth of India's animals.

Dr. S M Nair, the director of the government-run National Museum of Natural History, says such wild animals as cheetah, one-horned rhino, pink-headed duck and mountain quail have already become extinct. The next on the list of animals facing extinction are the tiger, lion, and red panda.

A recent book by Dr. Nair has listed 81 species of animals on the extinction list. India has a total of 340 species of wildlife. Also endangered are 38 of the 1,200 bird species and 18 of the 540 types of amphibians and reptiles, *Depthnews Young Asia*

Asian Air Cargo Traffic Expands

THE strong growth in Asian air cargo traffic is a key reason of recovery in the world economy.

This has been stated recently by David Pierce, Regional Director (marketing) of Boeing Commercial Airplane Group.

Mr Pierce in a statement said cargo traffic on Asian routes experienced the highest rate of growth in 1994—13 per cent—exceeding the world growth rate of 12 per cent.

Intra-Asia traffic is growing most rapidly and towards this, Asia will be responsible for 35 per cent of the world's manufactured goods by the turn of the century, said Mr Pierce.

He said the strong growth from Asia to North America was 13.9 per cent while Europe to Asia volumes were up to 13.2 per cent.

Trends in air cargo tended to indicate wider economic flows, often leading the world into and out of the recession, he said, adding that a key reason for the

growth last year was that most countries had moved through their economic low point and had begun to grow.

World wide, cargo traffic grew by 12 per cent in 1994. Boeing's figures showed. Cargo traffic between Europe and North America rose 13.5 per cent during the year and Asia—North America traffic increased 13.9 per cent, said Boeing, which measures this traffic as revenue ton kilometres moved.

"Growth on Europe to North America routes signals the end of the recession in Europe", said Mr Pierce.

Growth was strongest in the first half of 1994 and then eased, said Mr Pierce adding "with the world economy improving, we expect continued growth in air cargo." Yields were up slightly last year, "reversing a long trend downward", he said.

Boeing said that by 2014 it would have a 31 per cent share of worldwide air cargo traffic.

BD Shipping Times

A Stroll Through the Sundarbans-III

by Khasru Choudhury

FORTUNATELY, I was familiar with this sound produced by the male deer. A rutting call, but it sounded as ghostly as if it was a haunting sound from a horror movie scene.

It took me some time to settle my shattered nerve. I took a good amount of water first and then looked at my sleeping comrade's sculpture-looking-face trying to find any impact of the consequence, without success.

I looked at my watch and found it was quarter to four. I settled on the mattress and before I fell asleep I heard the *Chitals* alarm call twice and once from the lapwings. But as I could see the location of the lapwings from my reclining position, I just kept my eyes open for a while. Soon my tired eye lids closed and I fell asleep in no time.

My eyes opened may be an hour later. As I woke up, I felt a smooth cool breeze blowing over the meadow before me. The sun was hidden under the clothed foliage cover, but its morning red glow was sufficient for me to see all the colours around. The deer were so close to my machan hide that I could see their broad eyes clearly. Pasarine birds such as racket tailed drongo, magpie rahin and bulbuls were vocal with their melancholy notes.

As the sun rose well up over the tree line I looked at my sleeping comrade who was still in his sleep. I decided to descend from the machan. As the deer were busy in grazing all around and the birds were singing spontaneously, I felt no fear and took the deer track which intersected the meadow. The way was known to me as I travelled in this part quite often.

Walking some distance over the sand-laden, emerald-green morning, dew-soaked grasses it seemed to me that I had entered a wonder land. The deer gave way springing a few steps to keep a safe distance. None of them were scared enough to give an alarm call.

After crossing the big meadow I entered a narrow strip of longitudinal clearing keeping the dense forest on my right. One the left a series of Bonjam tree started. On my left I could see the forest's edge about hundred and fifty metres from me, intersected by some elliptical strips of

kewra trees with dense undergrowth of tiger fern bushes. The jungle path is at a higher elevation from the forest floor and is sandy; almost barren; with some scattered long grasses individually growing in the dunes.

Only twenty five minutes have passed when I suddenly heard a hysterical pooking of deer and sounds produced by their hectic rushing through the jungle cover. As the place of occurrence was well covered by the hudo fern and some kewra saplings, I could see nothing. I was so stunned by the fast development of the incident that I could not decide what to do. To my horror I saw the running deer break the hudo cover like a bullet and rush towards me.

There was no time for me to climb a tree or hide in the Bala bushes. I just threw myself into the sand ditch on my right which was only one feet in depth. There was no other cover besides some scattered grasses, I didn't dare to raise my head to find out what the oncoming danger was.

I could hear my heart beating like a drum and tried hard to control it, without success. I was afraid of being stam-

ped by some terror stiken deer, which may lead broken ribs or other organ, before even confronting the intruder.

Nothing happened. I was trembling with fear and by sheer will power kept myself from making any kind of movements. Now, six years after the incident, I still remember those moments of fear. I was so paralysed by fear that I could not think what to do next. After a while I could hear my companion Shahjahan calling for me at the top of his voice. From the sound I could make out that he was getting nearer to me. But I lacked the courage to call out to him and could not stand up on my legs, which were made weak from fear. However, his repeated call injected some life into my limp body and I stood up suddenly, with Shahjahan pointing his rifle towards me.

Shahjahan's story was like this. When he woke up and did not find me on the machan, he felt something had gone wrong. Right at that moment, he heard the chitals rushing and pooking. Looking in the direction of the meadow, he saw the animals running for life. He then got down from the machan to

look at the area of incident. As he did so, he saw a tiger crossing the narrow strip of the meadow. He was terrified but didn't lose his head like me. He could see my footprint lead to the place of incidence, he thought in sheer fright that I must have been devoured by the tiger probably.

He started off with his gun in search of me. Right at that moment I appeared in front of him, covered all in sand; frightening him out of his wits. Fortunately, he didn't shoot.

We found the pugmark of a male tiger which lead from the meadow diagonally towards the bushes and disappeared into it. The tiger had been walking only fifteen metres from the ditch I was lying in. We also found several old tracks made by the same tiger on the soft sandy ground and also in the beach, which was at a distance of two hundred metres from the area of incidence. We concluded that the tiger must be residing in the area.

The tiger was not a man eater, since I didn't hear any incidence of man killing in the area, but I was not sure how it would have reacted if it was surprised by the presence of a man.



Tigers prowling in the depths of the jungle

—The Vanishing Jungle

Travel Briefs

Growth of Asian markets: Both imports and exports were up, though imports still outnumbered exports by more than two to one. The total share of US seaborne trade was almost unchanged at 7.1%. Northern Europe and Far East remain the largest trading area, but the strongest growth was in emerging markets in South East Asia and Latin America.

Thailand, Indonesia and India were the leading countries for exports from port while Malaysia, Indonesia and India led the growth in imports. South America was a strong second.

EU commission protests: The European Commission will appeal against the suspension granted by the court of first instance of Luxembourg in the case of Trans Atlantic Agreement (TAA), reports agency.

The court had allowed the Taca shipowners to continue offering intermodal rates until a final decision regarding the basic legitimacy of the North Atlantic conference is taken.

First birthday of Shipping Times: Since its inception, the Bangladesh Shipping Times has been playing important role in the economic development of the country.

State Minister for civil aviation and tourism, Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan expressed this view while he was speaking as the chief guest at the function of the first founding anniversary of the journal held at Sonargaon Hotel on August 28.

Mr C J M Ursem, general manager in Bangladesh of KLM was the special guest. The Bangladesh Shipping Times started in Bangladesh a year ago as a result of joint decision from KLM and Bangladesh Shipping Times.

Security raised at NY airports: Security has been tightened at the three major New York City area airports because of a report that Islamic militants may be planning an attack at Kennedy International Airport.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the measures were put in place at Kennedy, La Guardia and Newark airports based on information from law-enforcement agencies.

— Tourism International

KLM starts coach service: KLM, Royal Dutch Airlines has started complimentary services to Chittagong and Nepal.

The coach service is operated by Nerapad Paribahan company with fully air-conditioned coaches and reclining seats.

KLM's passenger increases: KLM's passenger traffic increased eight percent for the 12-month period ended March 31 as compared to last year. This was accompanied by a five percent increase in capacity.

Business class traffic increased by 10 per cent, while tourist traffic increased nine per cent. The load factors on the US and African routes has also increased by more than five per cent.

— Tourism International

Air India faces problems: Air India has been unable to lease four Boeing 747 less than 10 years old. India's international airline received 18 bids last month for leasing of the aircraft with crew, but all of them offered only old planes.

— BD Shipping Times