



STOL Service in a Fix?

by Reaz Ahmad

THE business of Aero Bengal, the lone operator of the private air flights in the country, is inching towards a serious setback with Biman, the national flag carrier, started flight operation in an unorthodox Dhaka-Barisal route recently.

Private airlines Aero Bengal started STOL (short take off and landing) service in the new domestic route on July 16 this year. Aero Bengal is one of the nine private firms which got Provisional Air Transport Operating License (PATOL) from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) more than two years back.

In a recent development, Biman Bangladesh Airlines started operating a weekly

flight to Barisal from December 3. Biman fixed the one-way fare on this route at Taka 600 per passenger. One-way fare of Aero Bengal's Dhaka-Barisal flight is Taka 950.

When contacted, the Aero Bengal representatives blasted that the authorities have just thrown it to an unfair competition.

"When Biman is coming to our route, we are being deprived from operation in the domestic routes, where Biman operates. This is not fair at all," said Dr HBM Iqbal,

Chairman of the private airlines.

After starting flight operation in Dhaka-Barisal and Dhaka-Shamshernagar routes, Iqbal said, "we sought the authorities' permission to expand our service to Chittagong and Cox's Bazar but, recently the authorities denied us to give such permission."

Meanwhile, the CAAB sources also confirmed it to The Daily Star that the Civil Aviation Authority has denied to give authorization to Aero

Bengal in launching flights in the routes, where the national flag carrier is already in operation.

An official of the CAAB explained, it was pre-settled that CAAB would not consider any appeal for permission to start operation in the traditional domestic routes by any PATOL holders until they (private airlines) start flight service to the six non-traditional routes, which are specially meant for them.

It may be mentioned that the government earlier re-

furnished six air strips at Barisal, Comilla, Ishwardi, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon and Shamshernagar for the STOL service.

When his attention was drawn to the difference of air fare charged by Aero Bengal and that by Biman, a CAAB official said on condition of anonymity that "their fare is exorbitant. They are provided with fuel at the same concession rate as it is provided to Biman."

But, the Aero Bengal officials rebuffed this contention

just saying that "Biman can afford to make loss at the cost of national exchequer, that we can't."

According to Aero Bengal sources, it dropped flight frequencies down to once-a-week from earlier twice-a-week in Dhaka-Shamshernagar route and again the flight operation became dependent on availability of passengers.

Following the commissioning of Biman flight in Dhaka-Barisal route, Aero Bengal is now not getting capacity-passenger in every flights of its twice-a-day service in Dhaka-Barisal route.

In a latest move for its survival, the Aero Bengal authorities are contemplating to hold a press conference soon to explain its position.

Easter Island -- Still Mysterious

by Robin Davies

EASTER Island; the very name suggests something romantic, something strange and faraway. A dot of land surrounded by nearly one million square kilometres of blue sea and over 5 hours flying time over one of the loneliest stretches of the South Pacific, certainly qualifies for faraway. No wonder the first Polynesian settlers called it "TE PITO TE HEUA", or Navel of the World. Even with today's navigational aids, every Lan Chile pilot fortunate to fly there must view the emergence of the triangular-shaped volcanic outcrop with relief. The same sense of relief that swept the crew of Admiral Roggeveen's Dutch ship when, on Easter Day, 1772, they unexpectedly saw a low lying smudge on the horizon.

Flying in the unbelievable painter's sunset merely adds to the romance of visiting the world's furthestmost inhabited island. Despite all the photographs of the huge long-eared grim faced stone heads in elegant coffee-table books, despite all the theories as to their provenance and how fragile monoliths of up to 80 tonnes could have been transported, Easter Island, or Rapa Nui to its inhabitants, still retains the mystery remarked on by all early explorers.

One does not have to be an archaeologist or to have read Thor Heyerdahl's controversial book "AKU AKU" to be awed. This sea-girt universe contains more than one thousand giant stone legless statues called "Moai". Hundreds of petroglyphs with strange geometric patterns litter the ground. A birdman cult with odd rites is still celebrated annually. Immense unfinished statues, yet to be cut from the basalt they were carved from, abound. Others lie seemingly asleep where they were suddenly overthrown for reasons that continue to invite academic speculation. One can see statues puzzlingly buried, but only up to their eyes on stone heads, on the volcano slope, or perched

on top of carefully laid intricate stone temple platforms. Most dramatic are the slim lofty black rock busts between 3-6 metres in height — wearing red topknot headgear ("Pukao") cut from tuff, a compound formed from volcanic ash. Most peculiar, all the standing statues, with or without their strange stove-pipe hats, eerily look inwards with their backs to the sea.

Visually, the landscape is striking. Apart from three low extinct volcanoes with attendant cliffs and black beaches (only three are white sand), the countryside mostly resembles a soft green prairie interspersed with lumps of volcanic debris and herds of wild horses. Vistas of lawn-green hillocks and giant ancient stone walls obviously slotted together by expert masons appear stunning against a backdrop of Pacific breakers and puffy white clouds continually harassed by the dominant trade winds.

Hanga-Rao, the only town, faces a rocky inlet with one small jetty to protect the few fishermen's brightly coloured canoes-like vessels. A nondescript place housing most of the 2,000 Spanish-speaking inhabitants either engaged in Chilean administration, or tourism and its offshoots. There is little else to do for a gainful living. A school, a simple hospital, the old leper hostel, a few shops and several basic restaurants lining the only all-weather road plus a church with placards calling for a return of native Pasuans' land, is all there is to see. Souvenirs, though rudimentary, are authentic and indigenous. Crude stone figurines and more polished wood carvings of the famous facial images are obvious buys as are a range of T-shirts with varying motifs that can be bought nowhere else. More interesting and correspondingly expensive, are wooden copies of carefully incised tablets ("Rongo-Rongo"), showing the unique island script that has yet to be deciphered.

The rest appears next week

Chamba The Cultural Treasure-Trove

by Dileep Prakash

HIMACHAL Pradesh has, from time immemorial, been called "Deva Bhumi" or the land of the gods. The name is appropriate in view of the fact that the State has a number of temples dedicated to different deities. But it is its pristine natural beauty spots that have drawn people from both far and near.

Among the many beautiful locations and scenic spots Himachal has to offer is the Chamba Valley — one of the loveliest in the State. For one-and-a-half centuries this serene region has been a beacon for travellers and holiday-makers, some escaping the oppressive heat of the plains and others coming from further off in quest of its sylvan splendour. Perched on a ledge overlooking the valley, Chamba town seems frozen in time — a medieval memory complete with an array of superbly carved rock temples and palaces, some dating back a thousand years.

Chamba was founded in 920 AD by Shailvarman, a descendant of the Bramour kings. Soon after, he decided to raise a temple dedicated to Vishnu — the Lakshmi Narayan temple.

The temple-complex located a short way up from the Chamba Changan has in all six temples. Of these three are dedicated to Vishnu and three

to Shiva. The Lakshmi Narayan temple is the chief temple with a colossal image of Vishnu in pure white marble, said to have been brought from the far-off Vindhyan mountains of Central India by Shailvarman's son Yugakara after having crossed many hurdles. The sanctum-sanctorum of this temple has several interesting scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Chamba is full of temples. There is one in every nook and each is beautiful in its own way. The Brajeshwari temple is located at the entrance of the Sarota Valley on the outskirts of the town. The Chamba Devi temple is a good trek up from the town centre. It too has a metal mask for the main deity. Unique with this temple is its pentroof with wood-carved panels on the ceiling. One shows a rustic four-armed Shiva standing a tiger's skin and holding a trident.

The tradition of wood-carving in Himachal Pradesh has existed since ancient times. Its richness and mastery over technique can be seen in the carved door and window-frames, facades, balconies of temples, palaces and houses, carved panels, brackets and pillars, and figures of gods and goddesses. Today, this ancient tradition is kept alive

at the Wood Carving Training Centre, Chamba. Mohammed Latif Malik, a National Award winner and a master artist at the Centre, carves beautiful round figures as well as miniatures in relief on walnut, shisham, shahtut and deodar wood. Relief work is inspired by Chamba's rich tradition of Pahari miniature painting.

Chamba has been one of the major centres of Pahari miniature painting since the time of Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century. During his time Chamba became a Mughal fiefdom and many artists were sent here. Again in the mid-eighteenth century several miniature artists migrated to Chamba when conditions in Delhi became unfavourable under Aurangzeb. At Chamba, these artists got princely patronage from Raja Umed Singh (1748-64) and Raj Singh (1764-94) to produce exquisite miniatures.

From being a court art under the Mughals, miniature painting, by the time it reached the verdant slopes of Chamba, had become a vehicle for the expression of the painter's feelings and his beliefs in religion and love. The Krishna legend with its pastoral setting and its characters emanating from the ranks of commoners rather than the nobility gave the artist a chance, as in Europe, to por-



Intricate workmanship

tray the milieu with which he himself was most familiar. Just as the Madonna was depicted as a Flemish or Italian peasant girl, so Krishna became a Pahari cowherd surrounded by Pahari maidens in a hill setting. The Bhuri Singh Museum has a large section on miniatures from Guler, Basohli, Kangra, Garhwal and Chamba.

The Chamba Rumal (Kerchief) is one of its kind in the world. The embroidery is done in such a fashion that both sides look the same. Also, the stitch is so close that from a distance it looks almost like a miniature painting. Pahari painting is the central theme of all Rumal work.

Like wood carving, Chamba's metal work has its

— India perspectives — inspiration from the beautiful images of gods and goddesses.

Chamba's uniqueness lies in the fact that its artists and craftsmen have found the right atmosphere and backdrop to produce excellent works. And Chamba lives on to preserve and develop its extremely rich heritage.

Source: India Perspectives

Calcutta : A Victorian City

by Shahid Akhter Makhfi

THE city of palaces. The city of joy. A dying city. A city of contrasts. Call it what you will, Calcutta is Calcutta — India's Bustle-Fussabad. If you have visited India you won't think twice before referring to Calcutta as the perpetually busy city. It is a city identified with a precise date of birth — August 24, 1690, when a foreign adventurer, Job Charnok, landed here in the marshy, mosquito infested land surrounded by jungle, tigers and rice fields. It took less than a century for the paddy fields to bloom into a Victorian metropolis.

The swamps are hard to imagine in today's Calcutta which is thriving with LIFE. One needs courage and perseverance if one is to attempt the adventure of getting to know the city. Never visit this place with biased notions and a string of oft quoted epithets. Remarks by Robert Clive, Rudyard Kipling and Churchill are certainly disheartening. Clive called Calcutta, "the most wicked place in the universe" and Churchill wrote to his mother, "I shall always be glad to have seen it for the reason that it will be unnecessary for me ever to see it again." Kipling described it as the city of dreadful nights. Strong reactions; but if you survive that shock, you will probably fall in love with the city and it will grow on you.

One of the best ways of exploring Calcutta is to talk to the people. This is not difficult as Bengalis, the predominant residents of the city, are the intellectuals of India — being poets, painters, actors and musicians. It has rightly been credited as the crucible of culture, fine arts and education. What's nice about Calcutta is that most of it can be viewed from the window of a bus. If you find the bus too crowded, you could use the Metro, the only underground railway system in India, and cover many significant points in Calcutta.

More than anywhere else in India, the first impression will be the colonial buildings. Even post independence efforts have not been able to entirely obliterate the marks left by the British. For instance, the official new nam-

ing merchant prince of Bengal.

Not far from the Marble Palace is the Nakhoda Masjid, a Muslim prayer house of distinctive oriental character and design. Other religious sites in the northern periphery of Calcutta are the Jain temple better known as Parashnath Mandir. Further north is the Belur Math, the head office of the Ramakrishna Mission. Close by is the most celebrated temple garden of Dakshineswar. Another temple that adds pride to the city is the Kall temple of Kalighat — the microcosm of life in Calcutta.

If you are interested in exploring flora and fauna, a visit to the Botanical Garden on the west bank of the Hooghly may be rewarding. Spread over an area of 273 acres, it is a lovely spot famous for its exotic collection that includes a 200-year-old banyan

tree. You can also consider visiting Asia's largest stadium, Yuba Bhatti Kriangan, on the eastern fringe of Calcutta.

Almost all major cities of the world boast of a museum but the Indian Museum at Calcutta stands in eminence as one of the world's renowned museums. Built in 1875, it is an impressive building following Italian architecture. Its valuable collection includes even an Egyptian mummy! The Museum owes its origin to the Asiatic Society, acclaimed as the oldest cultural institution for oriental studies in the world.

The grand society found it difficult to manage its ever expanding museum and therefore handed it over to the government. A small museum is still looked after by the society but it is confined to archaeological relics and rare manuscripts for scholars and academics. Another pathfinder in the field is the largest library in India — the National Library, once the home of the Viceroy of India.

South of the Maidan is the Victoria Memorial. The marble structure with its massive proportions and stately dome built in memory of Queen Victoria is certainly one of Calcutta's most impressive buildings being a repository of British memorabilia covering over 5500 exhibits spread over 25 galleries. The spacious ground around the building was laid out with gorgeous flower beds and shady trees providing restful retreats.

Another impressive building on the north end of the Maidan is the Government House, renamed Raj Bhawan after independence. It was the official residence of the Governor Generals in Calcutta during British rule. Lord Curzon judged it to be the finest residence occupied by the representative of any sovereign or government in the world. The stately mansion with sixty large rooms, spacious public halls, throne room and garden is now the residence of the Governor of the state of West Bengal. Prior permission must be obtained to visit this house.

On the eastern side of the Maidan is the beautiful Cathedral of St. Paul. Built in 1839, this Gothic style structure was originally furnished with slender spire which was damaged by an earthquake. On the west of the Maidan is the new Fort William.

If you are looking for a stately ancestral home of Old Calcutta where you do not have to face the often repeated story of the glory that was, consider the Marble Palace, off Chittranjan Avenue. A dazzling abundance of marble, this Palace is in fact a misnomer as it is not a royal palace but a privately owned art museum with a treasury of original antique objects d'art — a collection which would be the envy of any art connoisseur. A century old piano fields at weekends by informal teams. In the middle of the Maidan is the Ochterlony Monument, now known as Shaheed Minar. The 152 feet minaret was set up in 1828 as a memorial to Sir David Ochterlony, a distinguished

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Victoria Memorial is certainly one of Calcutta's most impressive buildings

Travel Briefs

Gulf Air bonanza : The world's youngest but efficient airliner Gulf Air will add more comfort to passengers from the Indian Subcontinent with latest Airbus.

The airline has ordered for six airbuses having model A330-300s. By maintaining a young fleet, Gulf Air can compete in the market by offering passengers the comfort of the latest aircraft, while minimising operational costs through advanced avionics and low maintenance requirements.

Cathay will start NY flights : Under a new aviation agreement Cathay Pacific will start flights between Hong Kong and New York on July 1, 1996.

Initially it will fly every day from Thursday to Monday with a stopover in Vancouver.

Ry service between Jessore and Benapole : A train service will shortly connect Jessore with Benapole port so that cargoes to and from India can be moved quickly.

Reopening a train service between Jessore and Benapole will largely reduce the pressure due to import on Benapole port.

The railway authority conducted an engineering survey and estimated an amount of Tk 250 million for the rehabilitation of the 35 km line.

Japan to lower airfare : Japan is to introduce a new domestic airfare system which is expected to lead to lower fares and more competition among carriers.

Officials of all major Japanese airlines said that the introduction will eventually increase cost effectiveness.

The transport ministry will formulate the new airfare system by the end of the current year and airlines will be able set fares accordingly from April, next year.

Biman to improve service : In a recent meeting of the civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry, it was stressed that Biman must improve service by ensuring smooth and rapid luggage delivery, immigration and customs clearance of the passengers.

The state minister said that better passenger service is essential in order to increase the number of passengers and profit.

Biman starts Ctg-ME flights : Bangladesh Biman connected the south eastern port city of Chittagong (Ctg) with Middle Eastern (ME) countries on November 29.

The ceremonial opening of direct flight service between Ctg and Middle East was marked by a Biman DC-10 flying 244 passengers from Dubai and Doha to Chittagong.

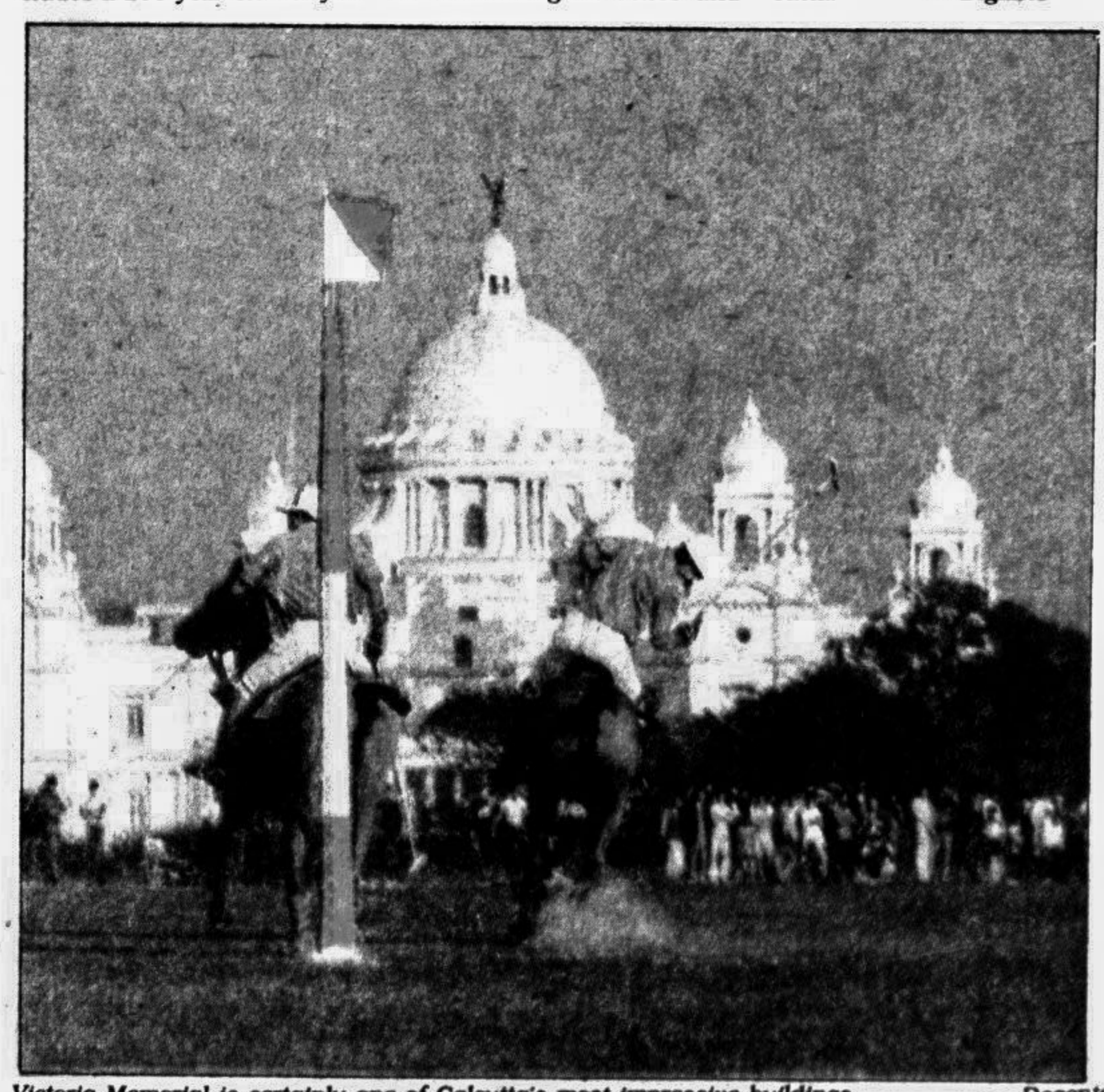
The route will be operated once a week, initially.

Jut cargo unit of Thai-Lufthansa : Lufthansa Cargo AG (LCAG) said it is pressing ahead with plans to develop a joint cargo company with Thai Airways International Ltd.

However, LCAG said that the proposal has now been placed on a lower priority. The two airlines formed a project team to workout details of the co-operation agreement, which was signed in October.

Garuda goes public in '97 : Indonesia's state owned airline Garuda plans to go public in 1997.

The project is aimed at reducing the airline company's dependence on the government. However, Garuda still needs to improve its personnel organisation and management to prepare for privatisation.



Victoria Memorial is certainly one of Calcutta's most impressive buildings

— Degorito.