

2nd Asia-Pacific Community Development Camp An Inspiring Experience

Mahfuz Anam

It was a beautiful sight to which I got up early in the morning of the 21st of December '95, my first morning at the Asia-Pacific COMDECA (stands for community development) camp, at Ta-Ma-Tu, Borguna, hosted by the Bangladesh Scouts. A song "Unnata Scouting, Unnata Samaj, Unnata Hok Ai Desh Amar" was blaring out of the public address system. To its rhythmic music thousands of scouts were marching in reasonably perfect order to their respective tasks of the day. There was a sense of purpose all round, and a rare joy of work seemed to animate them all. They were marching out to perform, what the organisers had very cleverly termed as "Challenges", 11 in all, which included camp craft, hiking and nature study, repair of roads and cyclone shelters, raising public awareness and giving practical demonstration about sanitation, public health, afforestation, etc.

Scouts from Indonesia, Japan, Australia, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Thailand, and Malaysia joined our boys and girls scouts, and worked hand in hand with them for the ideals of COMDECA, the most important of which is community development.

One of the new things that was introduced on this occasion was Youth Parliament. Young scouts from Bangladesh and other participating countries assumed roles of parliamentarians from a global constituency and debated about the problems that face us, especially those dealing with environment. The sharpness of the debate, and the clarity of thoughts and ideas that came out from it, were lessons for us all who were present as invited guests.

As I stood outside my tent in the warming rays of the early morning sun, and watched the scouts marching out, quite unconsciously I began to respond to the

beat of the scout song, and felt like joining them for the day. But regrettably I had a midday return flight to catch. It was early morning, and already all the tents have been cleaned, the bedding neatly folded and kept outside, and everything from inside each tent, especially the food items and cooking utensils were laid out in front for the morning inspection by the camp leaders.

The camp site was a virtual mini township with nearly 4,000 scouts living there. Rows of tents, neatly set up in a well designed manner with streets, lanes and open spaces interspersing the whole area gave the camp site a very impressive appearance.

I arrived the evening before. Immediately on arrival I was impressed by the huge-ness of the whole affair. Endless rows of tents bearing markings of their place of origin and the educational institution to which they belonged, showed that scouts from every nook and corner of the country had assembled there. Each group had some speciality in craftsmanship, which they proudly exhibited in front of their respective tents.

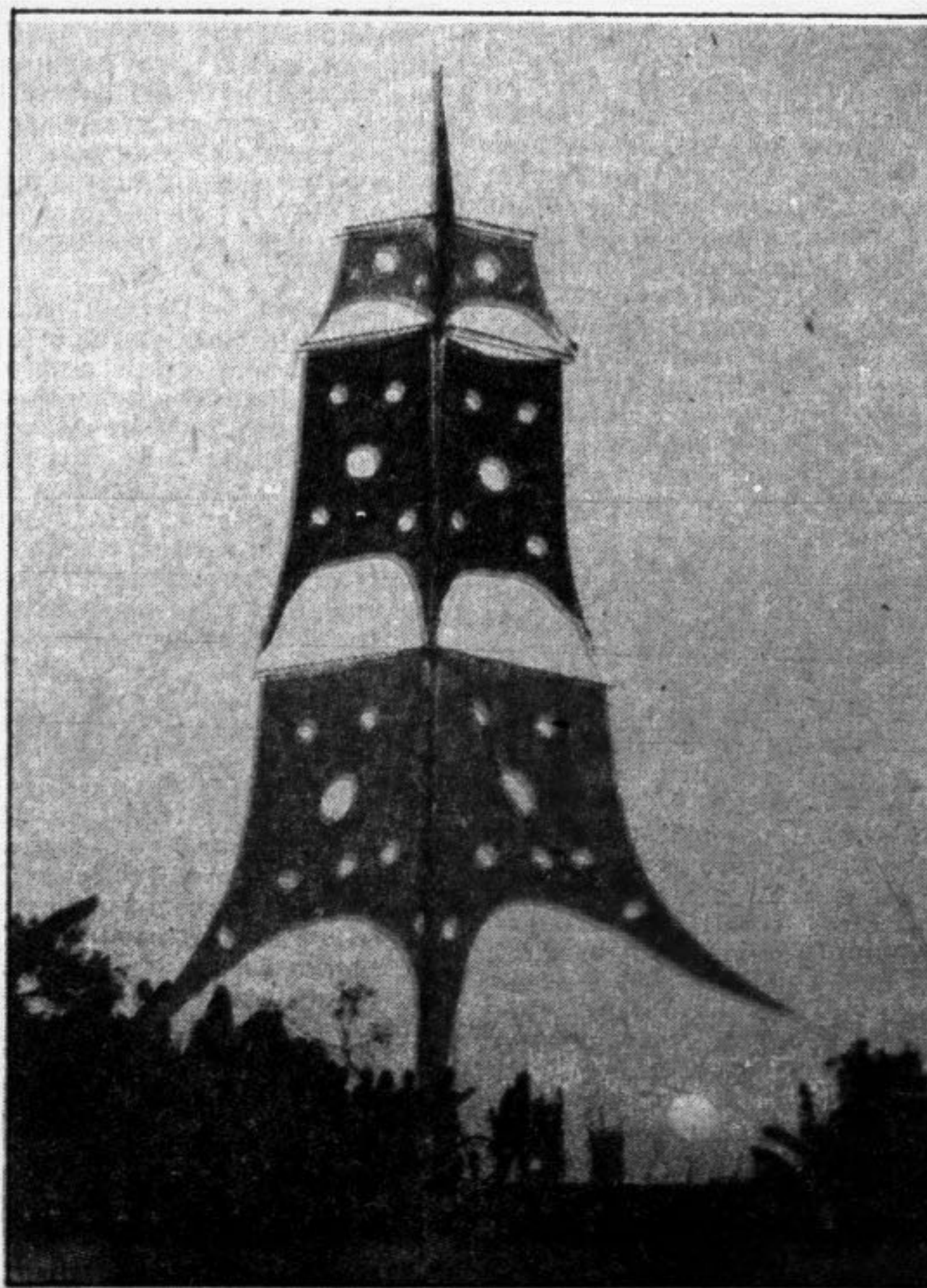
My recent closeness with the scouts grew out of the "Save Dhaka, Clean Dhaka" campaign which was spear-headed by them. I remember when I first wrote to the Chief Scout Commissioner Manzurul Karim about the campaign, he immediately responded, and called a meeting of the area leaders during which the details of the campaign took shape. Over the several Fridays that I worked with them to clean the city streets I saw the discipline, dedication and patriotism of the scouts. Their organising ability amazed me. Within days scouts at the local (para) level were mobilized and specific tasks were assigned to them, with a chain of command and

control clearly spelt out. It was such a heart warming and energizing experience. And it was to get more of it that I happily accepted the invitation to attend the COMDECA camp at Borguna.

The camp also included women scouts from all over the country who added a special dimension to the scouting movement. The campfire preparation was something to watch. Every group was to send their best performing troupe for which rehearsals were going on full steam the night that I arrived. It was the all round enthusiasm which was contagious. Everything seem to have dynamism of its own, and work just happen to get done. Behind it all was the scouts training and the leadership that was provided from the top.

From the little that I have seen at the COMDECA scouts camp I feel convinced that there should be more of such activities. I think scouts should be given special assistance to organise camping tours of historic and natural sights all over Bangladesh. These camping visits will help them to become more familiar with our country and develop their sense of belonging. In fact a whole range of school camping programmes can be developed in coordination with the scouts, since they have a lot of experience, which can involve most of government schools. This programme can be sponsored by the youth directorate and can be organised in batches. We think it will make an excellent addition to the overall educational experience of our school students.

After my unique and inspiring experience at the COMDECA camp, I would recommend a scout camping trip for anybody. I sincerely thank the Bangladesh Scouts for having me with them at the camp and giving me a chance to be their partners in this extraordinary venture.



"COMEDICA is a special workcamp of participatory and modern scouting conceptualised, planned and executed in the community and with its members".

(i) COMDECA provides opportunity for youthful energies and enthusiasm to blend with the local experience and wisdom.

(ii) In COMDECA fresh challenges are continuously met with courage, harmony and innovation.

(iii) It takes the form of an open school of Education for Life.

(iv) For the your "Future is Now"; the COMDECA aims to search and build the future, a world, free from hunger, and a shared vision of peace, progress and happiness.

As we reach out to the new millennium, the youths of today face a vastly changed world. Mankind is in a great transition because of Information Technology revolution, decay and demolition of barbed frontiers and old thoughts.

As perceptions change, so do the paradigms of historical continuity, philosophical understanding and social mooring.

Young people grow in this constantly changing interface of unfolding future, a present of melting social structures and a past of conflicts and glories.

OH! TAMATU

Nizamuddin Ahmed

M V Shahidoot was packed to its brim. Banners, bamboo staffs, trunks loaded with essentials, first-aid boxes, water containers, cooking utensils, harmoniums and drums, table and all were taking more space than the passengers. More than seven hundred scouts, rover scouts and scouters were on board. Their destination — TAMATU, acronym for a cluster of villages in Thana Amtali of Borguna.

These remote rural habitations, Taltoli, Malipara and Tulatali, their land soaked by the tidal waters of the Bay of Bengal, were selected by Bangladesh Scouts for the 2nd Asia-Pacific Community Development Camp or AP COMDECA.

Long before the boat left the docks of Sadarghat, the jovial passengers had struck a chord of celebration. And why not? After all, the scouts were on their way to participate in developing a community along side the down-trodden. It was one a.m. in the wee hours of December 17 when Shahidoot raised its anchor. The air was filled with a cacophony of song and music, and a degree of romanticism in anticipation of doing something for a community where people marvel at running tap water and electric bulbs.

Shahidoot was the second launch leaving Dhaka. M V Fazilat had left earlier on December 16 at six in the evening. Many other would reach TAMATU by other launches and by road.

On board the launches were scouts from Rangpur and Sylhet. Many more from Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla areas would be waiting at Chandpur ghat.

Delegations of scouts had come from Australia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Maldives, Korea, Japan, USA, Thailand, Indonesia and representatives from Asia-Pacific Region.

Beddings were unfolded

on top and bottom decks; the cabin passengers had too many guests for comfort. Water was scarce. "Khichuri" and vegetables were served whenever we were hungry.

TAMATU, the site of the COMDECA camp, is about 24 hours by boat from Dhaka. Shahidoot reached the Paiva River on the vicinity of the camp site at around midnight of 17th. No one thought of getting down at that unearthly hour. From underneath the warmth of their blankets, scouts peered in the darkness to see that Fazilat was being unloaded.

Scouts carried almost everything from Dhaka. Dry food, mineral water, tents, bamboo, computer, printer, photocopier, public address systems, chairs, tables, motor cycle, games, stationary, etc.

Tents were pitched on soggy rice fields; more than three hundred of them. Straw was strewn to make underbeds but even then the dampness seeped through. Three dining rooms were made with bamboo and C I sheet. Lavatories, always a problem in any camp, were set up at a distance. Shallow tube-wells and motors were siphoning yellow-coloured water into tanks; passing village children touched the tap water, amused and visibly impressed.

The camp was divided into four: Dag Hammarskjold, U-Thant, James P Grant and Ramon P. Magsaysay sub-camps. Each sub-camp had about sixty units of eight scouts and a leader.

The NGOs had set up stalls; movies by video projection, drama, songs being part of the fanfare. Red, green and yellow fabric fluttering on a sixty-foot tower at the gateway to the camp could be seen from miles.

The efforts of the scouts did not go unnoticed. About thirty thousand people from adjoining thana visited the camp everyday. To the villagers this was an exhibition of novelty. To the scouts, this

was a mission successful. COMDECA radio, was broadcasting daily programmes. In addition, an amateur radio service was also operating.

Scouts vaccinated about fifteen hundred cows, constructed an eight-foot road, partook with five households in scientific cultivation of their land, established fraternity with thousands of local children, offered treatment to villagers through a make-shift hospital, disseminated practical knowledge about solar drier, bio-gas plant, energy conservation and wind mill, informed the rural people about sanitation and public health, put up a permanent children park, discussed issues pertaining to future participation of youth leaders in the development process and got involved in matters that issue from a love for one's country and fellow being.

Scouts went on a 7 km boat ride to Sakima beach and Fatra forest where they overcame different pre-set obstacles.

For the first time girls-in-scouting took part in a combined camp with their male counterparts. Not only did the ladies compete shoulder to shoulder in all the challenges, in some they outdid the boys.

Meals were cooked by the scouts. They did face difficulty in view of the price of essentials skyrocketing overnight. However, everyone survived on Khichuri and lots of vegetables with an egg or two thrown in here and there. In fact, so thrifty were the scouts that on the last day almost all the units could afford a hearty meal of chicken curry.

It was not all work, of course. There were camp fires on three of the five nights. More than twenty thousand villagers enjoyed the Grand Camp Fire put on by the two and half thousand COMDECA participants.



eating out

Aasha Mehreen Amin

STEPPING into El Toro — which means the bull in Spanish — on Mirpur Road is like being transported to a miniature Mexican inn with its rugged orange walls, plaques depicting folk motifs and the smell of zesty jalapinos against a background of a catchy staccato Mexican beat. This is not all that makes up this ambience of a warm, romantic country that is so close to us in terms of culture and tradition yet so far away physically. The brightly coloured serapes (rugs) on the counter, the clay light shades, paintings of matadors and American Indians, the sombreros (Mexican hats), the paper mache pinata bull and many other little touches have all contributed in creating the coziness of a rustic Mexican hut.

This is just a hint of what this food shop is all about. The food which is hundred per cent Mexican cuisine is prepared right in front of you and is something totally new in Dhaka's restaurant scene. One can start-off with an appetiser of chips and salsa consisting of crisp corn tortilla chips to be dipped in a tangy relish of fresh onions, tomato, capsicum, herbs and spices mixed with vinegar and lime. This salivating item can be followed by a non-sense 'taco' — a crisp corn shell filled with grated cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomato with a choice of ground beef

or chicken all enhanced by a zesty, spicy taco sauce.

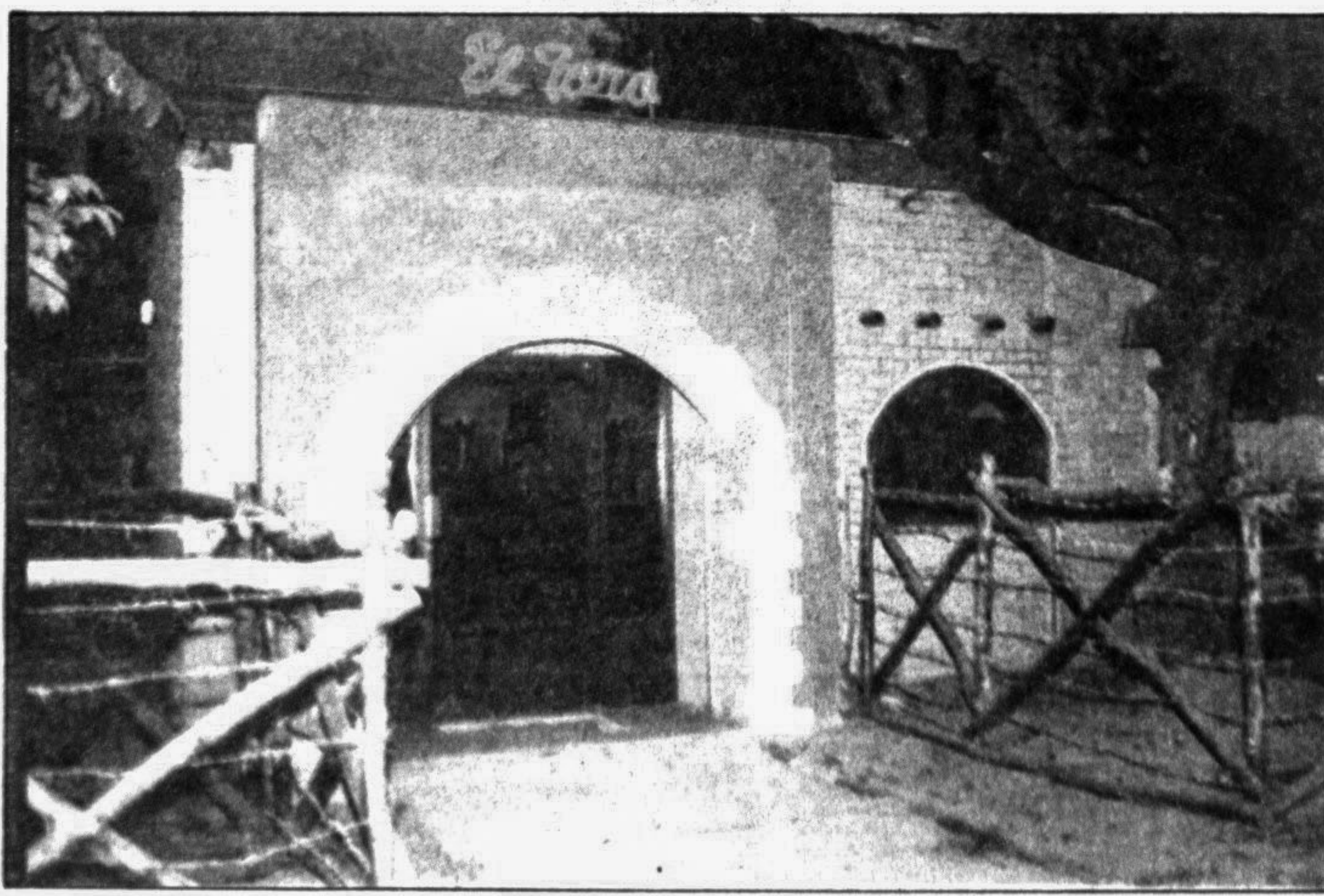
For a softer palate there are the burritos — soft chapati like tortillas covered seasoned, ground or shredded beef or chicken — smothered with enchilada sauce and melted cheese. As one can guess, this is an absolutely mouthwatering experience.

Other El Toro specialties include the quesadilla, a low calorie item without meat consisting of a flour tortilla with melted cheddar cheese, chopped onions, jalapinos and cilantro. This attractive medley is folded on a grill and served with garlic flavoured sour cream sauce in pizza slices.

For the incorrigible sweet tooth are two delicious desserts — the special 'deep fried' icecream and Apple Burro. The first, as its name implies, is a scoop of cinnamon flavoured vanilla icecream literally deep fried (you'd have to see it to believe it) and topped with whipped cream, a choice of chocolate or strawberry syrup and served on a flaky edible tortilla bowl (remember, eat the shell, not the clay bowl). The Apple Burro, another delight, is a flour tortilla stuffed light, is a flour tortilla stuffed with chunks of apples, raisins and walnuts served with warm cinnamon sauce and vanilla ice cream.

But the best thing about this American styled fast food joint is its immaculate clean-

Bringing Home a Taste of Mexico



liness. From the food counters to the floors everything is spick and span. The food is handled by employees who wear clean uniforms and gloves. All food items are kept with the highest hygienic standards using absolutely fresh items with proper refrigeration and storage facilities. The sauces and cheese are labelled and dated and kept at the right temperature.

Quality, in fact, is something that is almost obsessively maintained by El Toro's creators Iftekhar R Ahmed and the shops manager Imran Adnan Ahmed. "Quality, cleanliness and service is our motto," says Iftekhar. "El Toro is run like any American fast food joint with standardized packaging and portions." Everything is cooked daily by Iftekhar himself with fresh vegetables and meats. The prices are kept relatively high (a burrito costs around 130 taka) for snack food standards, explains Iftekhar, because the costs of maintaining this kind of quality of food and hygiene, are also very high. Moreover, a lot of the items, such as the spices, corn flour and cheese are imported, with 47 per cent tax, to ensure the consistency and authenticity of the food. "The icecream is from Gelatto, the sour cream from Sonargaon, for example," says Iftekhar, "and our overhead costs are high too."

With university degrees from the US and years of experience in the Mexican restaurant businesses there,

Iftekhar and Imran have brought a kind of professionalism quite rare in Dhaka's fast food business. Employees most of whom are HSC or BA students have to go through an intensive two-week training programme which includes written tests and mock trials on food knowledge, hygiene, sanitation, storing etc. "We stress on team work," explains Iftekhar, "to ensure efficiency."

Friendly service is also another marketing strategy. "At El Toro," continues Iftekhar, "we treat the customers as guests and we try to be as hospitable as we would be at home." This together with the place's cleanliness has ensured many repeat customers most of whom are local professionals and expatriates. Special personal touches such as balloons for the kids, stickers and gift certificates for regulars make this more than just a fast food shop.

Safety and environment consciousness are also high priorities. "We don't use staples in our bags," comments Iftekhar, "and we discourage plastic bags; all our custom made packages and plates (which are made of clay) are biodegradable but there is no recycling of containers."

At present, who has also done the interior decoration, is more concerned in giving something unique to food lovers: good food and good atmosphere.