

A TRIP TO REMEMBER

We weren't quite sure until the last day about our departure. I was very excited about this visit, keeping aside the fact that I would certainly miss a lot of school. My father, along with nine other Bangladeshi Nutritionists, was going to Philippines for a study tour to know more about BIDANI (Philippines Nutrition Programme).

21.01.2000

We arrived at the Zia International Airport at about 11:00 pm and boarded the Malaysian airlines on our way to Philippines.

22.01.2000

8:30 am (Malaysian time): We arrived at the Kuala Lumpur Airport. This airport was recently built and is very modern. An hour later we were finally on board to the plane taking us to Kota Kinabalu, capital of Sabah province, Malaysia. The airport, which overlooked the South China Sea, was not much less than a shopping centre. After 45 mins, we were on plane again heading to our main destination Manila. When we finally arrived at the Manila airport I was very tired and when I was told that we would be living in Los Banos city which would take two hours to reach I felt so bad that I wanted to tear off my hair. Two pretty members of BIDANI, Mary and Lorna greeted us at the airport. The moment our car exited the airport area, I instantly knew that I would love Philippines. Manila turned out to be full of McDonalds, Jollibees and Greenwicks-three of the most popular restaurants there. There are numerous fly-overs all over the city and I must say that the city is very clean. The roadsides are densely covered with trees that are terribly attractive. After a two-hour journey we finally entered Los Banos. We stayed at the guesthouse called CEC (Continual Education Center) of UPLB (University of Philippines, Los Banos). The university campus is full of jeepneys that take the students from one building to another. Jeepneys are tempo-like vehicles and charges 3 peso (1\$=4 peso=5taka) per head wherever one would want to go. We were told to be ready for dinner by 8:00 pm. In the evening we were taken to a local popular restaurant, Dalampasigan, which is very impressive. The whole restaurant is made of bamboo and it overlooked Lake Laguna. Vegetables were beautifully displayed on a table at the entrance. We had shrimp soup and rice covered in banana leaves. We also had extremely sumptuous chicken served on banana leaves. Our plate was itself a banana leaf. We even enjoyed fried Telapia fish.

23.01.2000

We woke up, pretty early to my standard, at 7:00 am. We visited city Calambas with Mary and Lorna as our hosts. That day Lorna's daughter, Ria, accompanied us. Calambas is the birthplace of Philippine's national hero Jose Rizal. We had pizza for breakfast at Greenwich. Even now my mouth waters at the thought of the pizza. We went to Makati city at Manila which is the commercial district. The country is totally Americanized. We visited Nayong, also known as the Mini Philippines. It is a huge area where each and every important places of Philippines are put on display. There is the model of the active 'Taal' volcano and products of each province are sold in traditional houses of the respective places. We even had a jeepney ride. We had lunch at a restaurant called Kenny Rodger's Roasters. After that we stopped at Malacanang-the presidential palace. We took advantage of no security guards around and took pictures in front of the main gate. We even took picture in front of the statue of Jose Rizal, their national hero. Then we paid a visit to the Manila zoo where I had the opportunity to see some birds and animals I would've liked to see: zebra, giraffe, elephant, hippos, peacocks, eagles, lions and different varieties of reptiles like snakes and lizards. Then we went for shopping at 'Harrison Plaza' a paradise for any shopping maniac. There we had donuts at a popular donut shop named 'Dunkin' Donuts'. We returned to Los Banos in the evening and had our dinner at ANEST Corner. We had delicious food! And food being one of my many interests, I knew I would enjoy here in Philippines.

24.01.2000

My father attended a conference that day and my mom, sis and I took the advantage as you can't really shop with those constant 'Quickly! Hurry up!' calls from my father. We visited the shops just outside the university campus; those shops were full of goodies, all of which you would like to buy but they were really expensive. A shopkeeper, Mr Randi, informed us of a cheaper shopping center-Olivarez Plaza. We went there by jeepney. We found the place pretty exciting. It had everything in it- stuffed animals, shirts, jeans, tee shirts, earrings, key rings, watches bags, shoes, cassettes & CDs, food and so on. We had pizza for lunch in Jollibee's at the Olivarez Plaza. Later we returned to CEC, UPLB. Then with the whole group we went to The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). There are hundreds of paddy fields for research experiments. Then we went around UPLB, which has simply everything student may ask for: food shops, tennis court, volleyball, football and baseball facilities, computer center, telephone booths, etc. By the time we went back to CEC it was time for dinner. We had our dinner in the hostel cafeteria and were once again served with delicious food items: prawns, chicken, fish and pineapple.

25.01.2000

My father attended another conference and so my sis, mother and I went on our own to the food shop of UPLB. Everything is available there from chips, drinks to shampoo and washing powders. We then took a jeepney ride to the Animal Husbandry where dairy products are sold. Then we took a tricycle to the dairy shop from where we bought milk as chocolate was sold out at that time. My mother has a great love for hibiscus flowers so we visited a huge nursery, where different kinds of plants are

available. Then we took a peddl cab (tricycle attached to hooded seats) to the nursery. There are lovely varieties of hibiscus and hybrid hibisc

They decorated their places with locally available materials.

28.1.2000

We departed in the morning for yet another hectic day. Today we had Beth and Jason, our host in the social gathering, to accompany us. First we attended a meeting at Santa Cruz again. Later we attended yet another meeting at another barangay, San Jose. A lunch was arranged for us outdoor. It was very windy and the lunch was very pleasant. Then we visited a Nutrition Hut. Our next stop was at a famous shoe shop. The shoes were of very good quality and the price was reasonable. We then had snacks at IRRI's main cafeteria. It's a matter of pride, you know. There we met two Indian students studying at IRRI. One was from Kerala and the other from Karnataka. Then we went straight back to CEC.

29.1.2000

That day we were going by air to Mindanao, one of the three main islands in Philippines. We arrived at Cagayan De Oro airport at around noon. On this trip our host was Sheila from Los Banos of BIDANI. On our way to city Valencia, we stopped at a restaurant called Nanana's Food for lunch. Here also, the food was stupendous. We stopped at a sea beach on our way. The sea was South China Sea, which surrounds the whole Philippines. The weather was pretty cool. In Philippines, they have only two seasons: monsoon and summer; they don't have winter. They informed us that the time we were there, it was their coldest season. Our Journey was smooth at first. But later it turned out to be quite rough. The roads carved through the hills and over them. The sight was beautiful! There was the sea and so many roads below us. We could also see the clouds around us. Valencia is a small city that is not as developed as Los Banos is. We stayed at Hotel Valencia.

30.1.2000

That day we attended a meeting at city Kitaotao in the morning after a one hour journey from Valencia. We had lunch at MGM resort. It is a lovely place with swimming pools. We then paid a visit to the Mindanao Central University. It is big but small compared to UPLB. Later we went to Gaisano Shopping Plaza. We returned to our hotel at evening and after having dinner at the hotel retired to bed.

31.1.2000

We departed from our hotel in the morning. I was delighted at the thought of returning to Los Banos. We had time so we visited the delicacy food shop. We had breakfast at the McDonald's. We arrived at the Cagayan de Oro airport at noon. The plane departed immediately; it took us two hours to reach Manila airport. We had lunch at a fast food shop. Then we visited 'The Landmark' shopping center. After shopping, we headed back to CEC.

1.2.2000

It was our last day in Philippines and so my mother, sis and I visited IPB. There were hundreds of varieties of hibiscus. We gaped in amazement at the hybrid plants and flowers. My mother bought a hibiscus plant from one of the nurseries of the national highway road that we visited after IPB. We had lunch at the BIDANI's president's house. We enjoyed crabs along with rice and chicken at lunch in the garden. Later we went to see the Taal volcano and our way passed coffee and pineapple plantations. We also went over the magnetic hill. The driver stopped the car to show us how the hill's magnetic force can pull the car forward. We saw the Taal volcano from over a hill. It is the only active volcano on an island at present and last erupted in the year 1965. Lake Lagoona surrounds it. Then we visited one of Marcos' many palaces on top of a hill that is now completely ruined and has been named 'People's park in the Sky.' Later we returned to CEC, our home at Los Banos.

2.2.2000

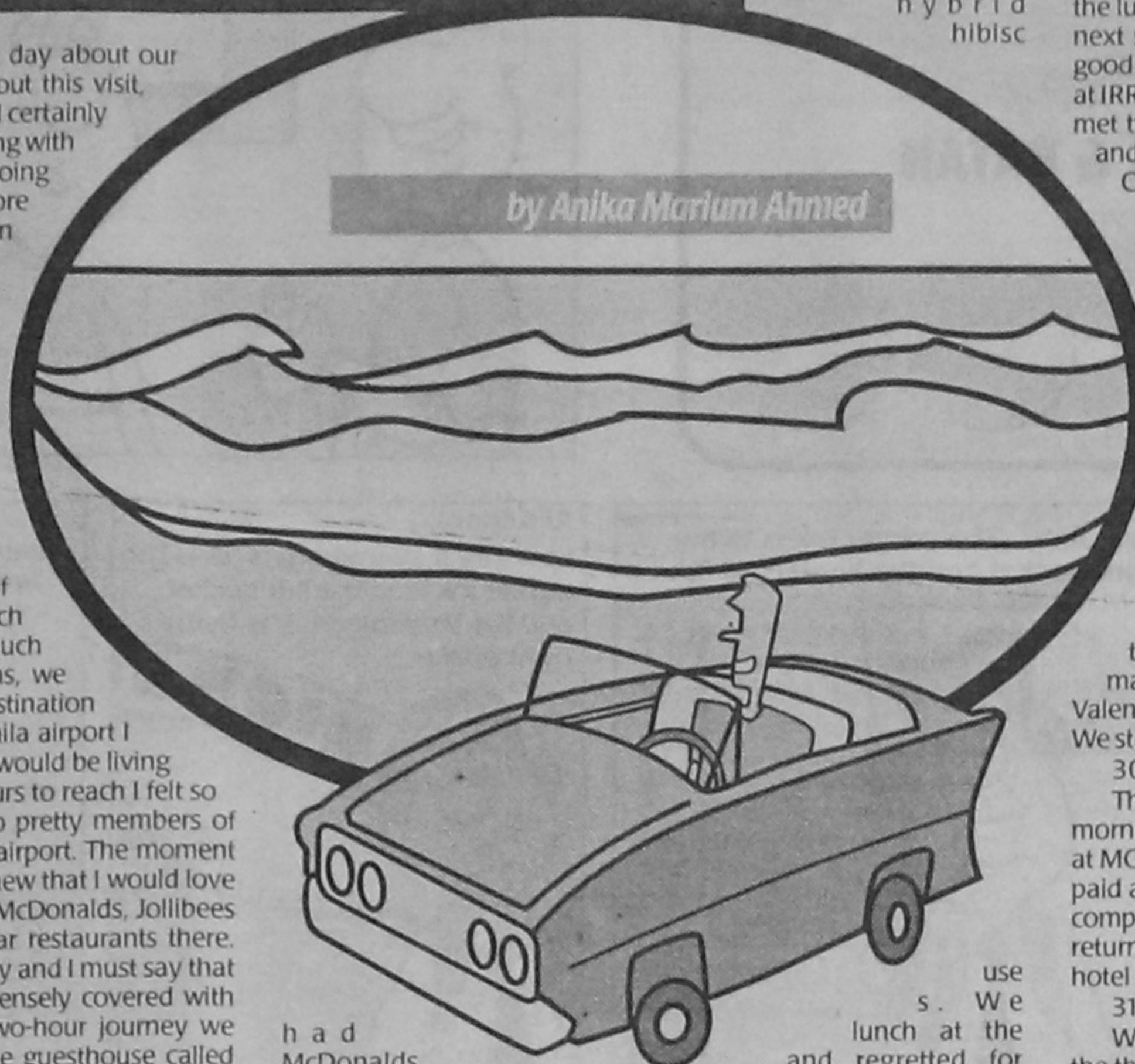
We had our breakfast for the last time at the cafeteria. Then we headed for the airport. I bid goodbye to Mary, Lorna and Ria and wished to stay for atleast one more day. We had two-hour flight to Kota Kinabalu and another four-hour journey from there to Kuala Lumpur. We arrived at the KL Airport late in the evening. We stayed at a four-star hotel Crown Princess. Kuala Lumpur is very nicely decorated with colourful lights in the shape of palm trees and the city is very modern with skyscrapers and flyovers.

3.2.2000

We left for a country tour in a tourist bus. The tourguide of Indian origin informed us about the various spots we visited. Malaysia has a sizeable population of Indian and Chinese origins. First we were taken to an antique and handicrafts shop. After that we went past many foreign embassies and the Haji Masjid which has five pillars to show the five pillars of Islam. Our next stop was at the Pewter factory. We were shown there how metal products from this metal (97% tin and 3% copper) are made. Then we were taken to the rubber plantation where we were shown how rubber trees are tapped to bring out the latex. Next they took us to Papillon where they preserve colourful butterflies. We observed different products embalmed with butterfly, like penholders, keyrings, framed butterfly wings, etc. After that we visited Batik centre full of Batik shirts, ties, skirt-tops and nightgowns. Our next stop was at a cave of the Indian origins the name of which is Batu cave. My sister and I climbed 207 steps to the cave and let me tell you this: it was worth climbing up. There were a couple of statues of Kalima. Stalactites and stalagmites were everywhere. After buying some lunch boxes (Indian food) we returned to our hotel. After a long rest visited the famous Petronas Tower (the tallest building in the world). The first eight floors are a shopping center and the rest are for office purpose. Later we visited the KL tower. The fourth tallest tower in the world. We went to the topmost floor from where we enjoyed the panoramic view of Kuala Lumpur. In the evening we went to Jamek Masjid India. The whole place made me feel like I was in Chennai, India. There are Indian shops everywhere. We had dinner at an Indian restaurant with rice, beef, prawn and daal. We then returned to the hotel by subway.

4.2.2000

That day we had breakfast at the McDonalds. We then shopped a bit and visited Jamek Masjid India again. We returned to the hotel at late afternoon. After taking a nap, we boarded a bus and headed for the airport. We reached Dhaka in the early hours with the luxurious memories of the trip lingering in my mind.



by Anika Marium Ahmed

had lunch at the McDonalds and regretted not having McDonalds at Dhaka. We returned to CEC in the evening. We were to have a special gathering at the ground floor at CEC which promised to be an exciting one. The gathering was exciting to say at least. Our host was Jason, a member of the BIDANI. He tried to entertain us in every way he could. First we started with prayers and then the Philippino sang their national anthem. Then we sang our national anthem and a few national songs. Then the UPLB dance group entertained us with a Southern Philippino dance, glass dance and then a bamboo dance they were pretty fantastic! The Philippino music group entertained us with few of their traditional songs. Then we had dinner sumptuous once again!

26.01.2000

That was the first time I was going on a study tour. To tell you the truth, I would've rather stayed in than go with the Nutrition team. But I didn't have the courage to say it to my father. Anyway, we departed early morning and reached Pakil, a barangay (village in Philippino language) an hour later. We attended a meeting in the local municipality office where we were served with coconut pie, which in Philippino language is known as Buko Pie; it is one of the delicacies of Philippines. Here the meeting started with prayers and their national anthem. After the meeting we visited a natural spring-pool. We had our lunch at a restaurant called 'The Beatles'. The restaurant was made of bamboo and all over the walls there were pictures of 'The Beatles'. The owner, as expected, is a great admirer of 'The Beatles'. After hearing that we are from Bangladesh, the chef, who knows a bit about how to cook Bangladeshi food, prepared for us typical Bangladeshi dishes of fish, chicken curry and vegetable with rice. The Philippines take rice three times a day. After the stupendous lunch we walked around in the neighbourhood.

We visited the demonstration farm for agriculture, Pakil school and also a fish rearing farm. On our way back we stopped at a town called Paete well known for handicrafts. We also visited the man-made Lake Caliraya. The place is a beautiful resort and the view is panoramic to say the least. After that we visited an embroidery shop where the price was pretty expensive. We returned to CEC late in the evening and after a long rest had our dinner in the cafeteria. After dinner we took a small walk around the campus and visited the UPLB auditorium where a nice function was taking place. When I finally retired to bed I thought what a wonderful day it was! I simply wished I could turn back time.

27.1.2000

That day we visited Santa Cruz city where we attended a meeting. We were to meet the governor of the city but as he couldn't come, his wife, the first lady, Mrs Joyee Leena was there in his place. We stopped for lunch at a local restaurant at LSR cafe Elyze. There we had fish, chicken fry, squid and halo-halo. Squid is a type of snail that is very popular in Philippines and halo-halo is a desert (from bottom to top) with layers of fruits, milk, and then ice cream at the top. It was so-so. We had tea at Lorna's house, which is not far from UPLB. There were two of the delicacies of Los Banos. One the Buko pie and, two the cassava cake. Cassava is a type of plant (the root is taken as food) from which the cake has been made. My sister tasted it and told that it tasted and smelled like boiled egg and as I am not exactly fond of egg I didn't dare to even smell it, let alone taste it. Later we visited another natural spring pool. The water was pretty cold and crystal-clear. It is a tourist resort and there is a hotel beside it. We were going to Olivarez plaza once again. You see only my sis, mother and I have gone there before while the others were attending the conference. And believe me, and it's not that hard to believe, that we were looking forward to go there once again. We returned to CEC pretty late in the evening. I retired to bed and thought that Bangladesh is very similar to Philippines but we lack creative ideas. For example, at the meeting venue at Santa Cruz, they hung empty coconut shells at the edges of the roof of the open hut, with lemon grass type leaves decorated inside them. Surely, a coconut doesn't cost much in Bangladesh and is much available,