



A Traveler's Diary – by Hashini Galhena Dissanayake

12/11 DAY 1 – Pre-travel

I planned to go to the Bangladesh Embassy in Sri Lanka to collect my passport. The visa officer told me that it would be ready after 3:30PM. So I took a taxi to the Bangladesh Embassy in Colombo. Traveling to downtown Colombo can be time consuming due to traffic so I decided to leave at 2:30PM to make sure I reached the Embassy before its 4:00PM closing time. I hoped I am granted the visa today. I was scheduled to leave for Bangladesh this morning but had to change my flight plans because the process took longer than I anticipated.

As expected the roads were highly congested due to on-going road construction work and school rush hour. Fortunately, I had a very resourceful taxi driver who knew alternative roads to get to the embassy. We reached the embassy 15 minutes before the counter closed and I was able to get in just in time. After completing the visa formalities and making sure the information on the visa was correct, I headed back to get ready for travel the following day. On the way back, I stopped at a gift store to pick up some Sri Lankan tea and spices as gifts for my Bangladeshi counterparts. I finished my packing around 8:00PM and decided to take a short nap before leaving for the airport early in the morning.

12/12 DAY 2 – Travel Day

Got up at 1:30AM and got ready to go to the airport which is about 1 hour and 30 min from where I resided. I had pre-arranged a taxi and the driver arrived at around 2:30AM. The roads were quiet at this time with hardly any traffic, we took the expressway to the airport and arrived around 3:15AM.

My flight was scheduled to leave at 6:00 AM. The terminal of the airport was crowded as many flights were also scheduled with early morning departures. I cleared airport security and walked to the check-in counters. After obtaining my boarding pass and checking in my luggage, I filled out the airport embarkation form and went through immigration. Even though the lines were rather long, they moved quickly. Then, I walked to the gate and soon was on my way to Dhaka.



View from my window seat as I prepare to depart Colombo.

The airplane ride was smooth except for a few bumpy spots over the Bay of Bengal. Breakfast was served on the plane and the flight lasted about four and half hours. I landed in Dhaka at 1:30PM in the afternoon. Dr. Jahangir, our country coordinator for the project informed me that

he had already arranged transportation for me. So after immigration and baggage collection, I walked to the arrivals lounge where I met a young women holding a sign with my name. She accompanied me to the car park and got me into a car which took me to the Seven Seasons Hotel in the Dulshan neighborhood.

The ride was very interesting, I got to see the city and its activities and experience Dhaka traffic. There were many different street-side traders catering to various social strata. Vendors on every street corner were selling national flags of all sizes in anticipation of the approaching celebration of Victory day marking Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan.



The traffic was very congested throughout Dhaka.

Photo courtesy of Phill Wharton



Vendors lined the streets offering all types of goods.

Photo courtesy of Phill Wharton

I checked in at the hotel, it was clean and comfortable. The rest of the team has already arrived, and I was supposed to meet them later in the afternoon to attend some meetings at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Center (BARC). I freshened up and waited for their call.

Later, I got a text from one of my colleagues that they were caught in the heavy traffic jam and and wouldn't be able to drive by the hotel to pick me up due to time constraints. However, I was informed that we would all meet later in the evening where I would meet project recruits Vijay, Ritu, and Arif.

12/13 DAY 3 – Launch!

It's finally the day of the project launch, the team met in the lobby all dressed-up and ready to head to BARC for the ceremony. We got into the vehicles and started moving through the morning rush hour in Dhaka. The streets were crowded and highly congested. We were welcomed by The Additional Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Mohammad Islam and Executive Chairwoman BARC, Dr. Bhagya Banik. After a short meet and greet, we headed to the main auditorium where the public launch was to be held. We had front row seats to the event and the auditorium was filled with other invited officials, scientists, and guests.



The auditorium was at capacity for the project launch ceremony.

Shortly after taking our seats the program began. We all raised for to show our respect to the national anthem of Bangladesh and for an early morning prayer. First on the agenda was a welcome speech followed by number speeches by Bangladeshi officials including Dr. Banik.

Then it was time for Dr. Dave Douches of Michigan State University to deliver the keynote address. He introduced the team and emphasized the significance of the project in tackling a key problem facing the potato industry in Bangladesh. The Minister of Agriculture of Bangladesh Hon. Begum Matia Chowdhury spoke next in Bangla in a very assertive and compelling tone.



Dr. David Douches, Project Director, addresses the audience.



The Minister of Agriculture, Begum Matia Chowdhury

Finally, the Additional Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Islam delivered the vote of thanks. We were then escorted to a conference room for lunch. The international guests were offered a boxed lunch. But I opted to have the traditional food which was delectable. After lunch we had a meeting with the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) team. This was a discussion involving roles and responsibilities, contractual elements, and timelines for our project.

We had the rest of the day to our self until Dinner. Dr. Jahangir, our country coordinator and host invited us to his home for dinner with his family. His wife had prepared many delicious local dishes. They also gifted us with colorful handloomed table décor.

12/14 DAY 4 – Gazipur



We had a foggy start to our day.

I got up early and headed to breakfast. Today, Dr. Wharton, a project team member, and I were to travel to BARI in Gazipur for a dual mission. My mission was to connect and discuss the socioeconomic work with Agricultural Economics division of BARI. Dr. Wharton, was to assess the facilities at the Tuber Crops Research Center (TCRC). It was a gloomy and foggy day but it was an interesting ride through local streets and markets. On the way, I got to see aspects of local peoples' lifestyle and day-to-day activities.



Along our route we encountered many different local scenes. It was interesting to experience the culture and people of Bangladesh.

Photos courtesy of Phill Wharton

The roads cleared a bit after we got out of Dhaka. We drove past BARI's research fields and reached TCRC in about an hour and a half. Dr. Molla, Principal Scientific Officer, was there to welcome us.



Tuber Crops Research Center (TCRC) is a division of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute.



One of the many research fields at the Gazipur facility.

After a brief meeting, Dr. Molla accompanied me to the Agricultural Economics division of BARI. There I was introduced to Dr. Rashid and Dr. Islam. I gave them an overview of the work I intended to do under the socioeconomic component of the project. After my meeting, I returned to TCRC to participate in a site visit with Dr. Wharton. Dr. Molla gave us a tour of the facilities including their research labs, tissue culture labs, germplasm and gene banks, greenhouses etc.



Our tour of the Tuber Crops Research Center was very interesting and informative.

Later we were served a simple but delicious lunch at the staff cafeteria. After lunch, we headed back to Dhaka. That evening the team gathered at a restaurant that serves 101 dishes, I especially enjoyed the seafood.

12/15 DAY 5 – Work and a little bit of fun!

Over breakfast the team discussed our plans for the day. I worked on my own on til around noon when Dr. Jahangir took us to a traditional arts store. It had a variety of crafts from all over Bangladesh at very reasonable prices. I bought myself a traditional embroidery wall-hanging. Later Dr. Jahangir took us to a restaurant by the side of the river to have fried fish while watching the boats and sand barges pass by.

12/16 DAY 6 – Departure

After settling my hotel bill, I headed to the airport early. There was some traffic on the way to the airport, but I still arrived two hours in advance of my return flight. I checked in at the counter and obtained my boarding passes. Soon I was on my way back home. It was a successful trip and much was accomplished!



Feed the Future Biotechnology Potato Partnership Launch Team. Dr. Hashini Galhena Dissanayake is pictured second from right.