

Star WOLIDAY

DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 19, 2003

nextinline



Forest symphony



Indian porcupine



Albino Fishing cat



Malayan Sun bear

LOCATION > LAWACHHARA, MOULVI BAZAR. CATEGORY > FAMILY / ADVENTURE

Sitesh Babu's Treat



Lorikeet



Green pigeon



Button quill



Whistling teal

AS the daylight faded fast, we entered the village, mainly inhabited by the Monipuri people not far from Srimongol. Monipuris are natives of the Indian state of Manipur and settled in Sylhet around 200 years back. They are good cultivators, craftsmen and humble persons. They have their own language close to Indo-Burmese origin.

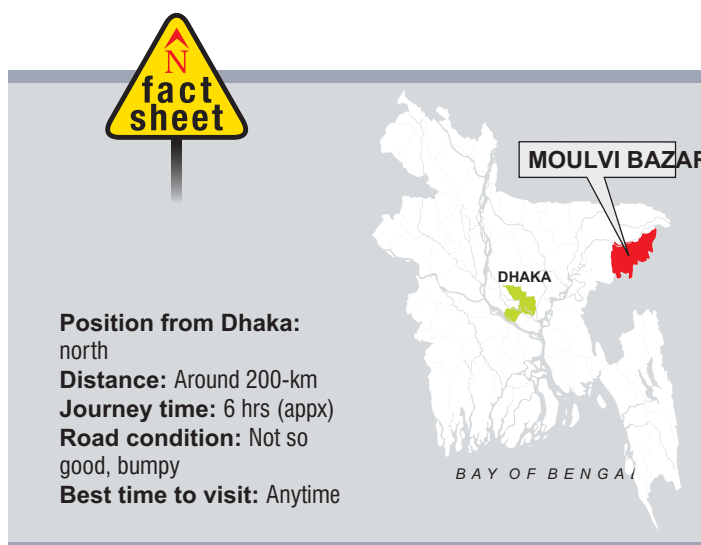
They are mostly Hindus but some of them have embraced Islam. During the full moon of the Bengali month of Kartik, Monipuris celebrate their biggest festival -- the Rush Purnima -- in memory of Lord Krishna with their traditional dance.

Monipuris are highlanders, but here in Srimongol, they have settled in the plains. Each of the households consists of at least two weaving machines. The hospitable Monipuri weaver girls welcomed us to show their delicate colourful weaving style. We could not resist our temptation to buy some of the traditional Monipuri clothes. We came to know that other than weaving most of the Monipuri people are employed by the Khasias in betel plantations.

Later, we visited Sitesh Babu's private zoo. As far my knowledge goes, our wildlife act does not permit anybody to keep wild animals in custody. But Sitesh Babu did it. We were welcomed by Sitesh Babu. It appeared to us that he must be around his sixties.

A stocky hunter, Sitesh Babu took interest in rearing wild animals in his custody contrary to the wildlife act. Inam and Pintu tried to grill Sitesh Babu over his 'illegal act'. But in his support, Sitesh Babu produced some paper cuttings and a worn-out hunting permission, which is long past its validity.

Anyway, peace was restored and Sitesh Babu



Position from Dhaka: north
Distance: Around 200-km
Journey time: 6 hrs (appx)
Road condition: Not so good, bumpy
Best time to visit: Anytime

showed us some skulls of wild animals like wild boar, leopard, fishing cat, leopard cat along with some stuffed birds like shelduck, whistling teal, large Indian hornbill, Kalij pheasant, red jungle fowl etc.

Some skins of cobra and rat snakes were also there. But the most interesting of them were two week-old kittens of leopard cat. We could not resist patting them and cuddling them in our

hardly stretches three feet tall, still it is called Mechho Bag in Bangla. So, he quickly grabbed the Mechho Bag and posed for photograph. A grumbling Zakir finally agreed to take a snap. Thereafter, Khosru is known among us as Mechho Khosru.

Sitesh Babu told us a hunting story in the Lawachhara forest. He encountered a bear and wounded it. While he was trailing the bear, the animal suddenly



Bronze winged Dove

laps. But Khosru took one step ahead. Among his friends, he is known to be a tiger tracker, but then he could never prove to us that he ever saw a tiger. So, this time he did not want to lose the opportunity. Be it a kitten of leopard cat, the adult of which is

came out of a bush and killed Sitesh Babu before being mauled by a fellow sportsman. His face was badly deformed. He lost one eye and it took him a long time to heal.

Sitesh Babu led us to his zoo in the backyard of his residence.

It is a small yard where the animals and birds are kept in different netted enclosures. Most of the animals are in bad conditions with little room to stretch out.

Among the animals are a Malayan Sun bear, barking deer, an albino fishing cat, leopard cats, toddy cats, slow loris, rock python, green pigeons, emerald doves, spotted doves, turtle doves, red jungle fowls, ruddy shelducks, pintails, godwits, purple moorhens, white breasted moorhens, rose ringed parakeets, lorikeet and some plovers and tortoises.

On our return journey, we saw groups of people including women and children walking along the road in a festive mood. On inquiry, we came to know that they were going to attend the marriage ceremony of the brother of a Khasi headman.

As we were eager to see the ceremony, we drove a little further up, turned right and took a tiny dirt road through hillocks. On both sides of the hillocks, we saw plantations of lemon, pineapple and betel leaf and bamboo clumps.

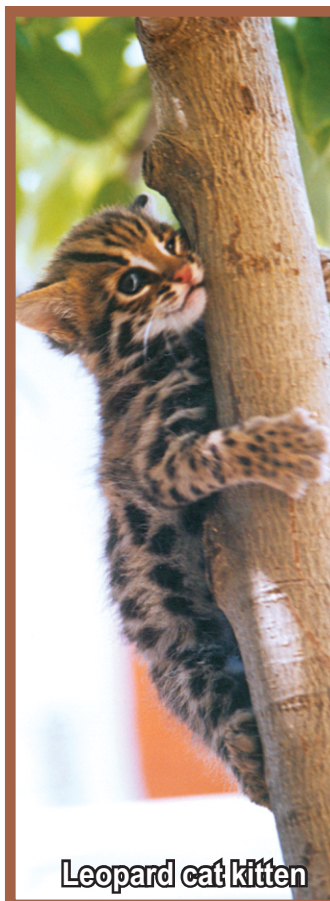
We crossed about a couple of kilometers before reaching the Khasi Punji or Khasi neighbourhood. Khasi people are wealthier than other indigenous communities. On the slopes of the hillocks, the Khasias built their houses. The Khasias are mostly Christians and their marriage ceremony follows the Western style.

The bride was dressed in white gown and bridegroom in suits even in the terrible hot and humid weather. A mobile band group played western music.

Story KHOSRU CHOWDHURY
 Photo SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN and INAM AHMED



Rhesus monkey



Leopard cat kitten

Budget

Microbus fare (7-seater) - Tk 3,000
 Fuel- Tk 3,000
 Food - Tk 2,000
 Room rent Tk 1,200 (three rooms for one night)
 Total Tk 8,200

Traveltips

Leeches are rampant in the forest, especially if it is monsoon. So, take a concoction of ground tobacco leaf and mustard oil. Rub it well over your exposed parts.

Always wear sneakers or trekking shoes, never go barefooted because of leeches.

Take raincoats or umbrellas.

Take plenty of water. It is going to be extremely hot in the forest.

Take some anti-septic ointment as protection against biting ticks. Take paracetamols because if these ticks bite you, you are going to get fever.

Take torches.

Take binoculars -- the more powerful the better it is.

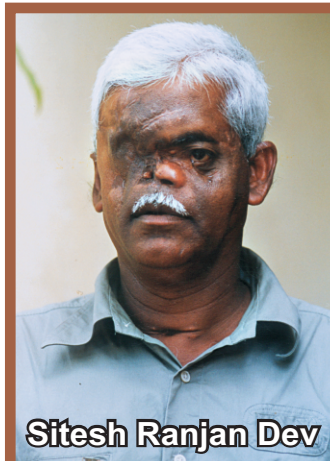
For photography, forget to take at a 400mm zoom.



Full grown Leopard Cat



Khasi marriage sequence



Sitesh Ranjan Dev