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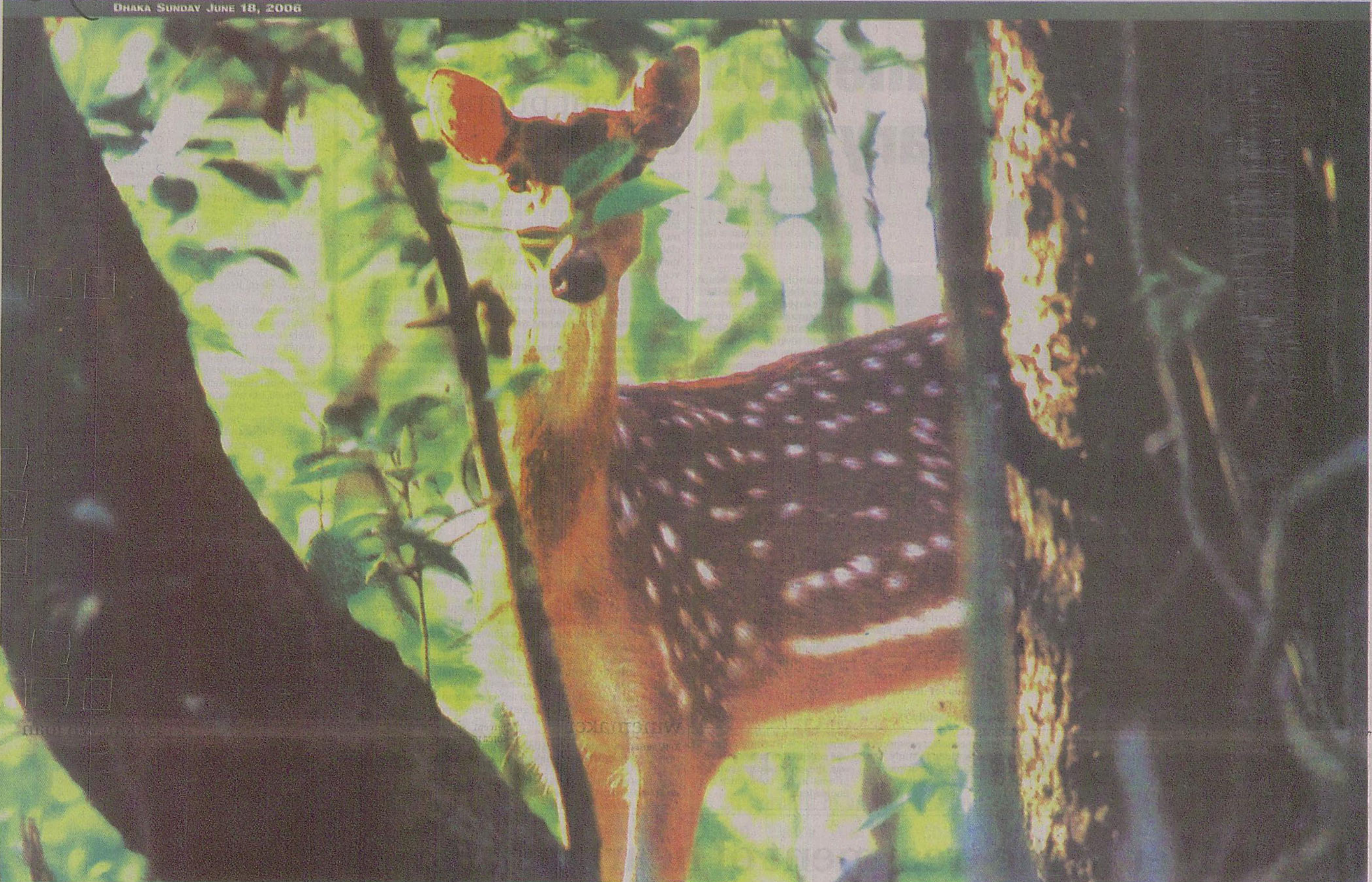
DHAKA SUNDAY JUNE 18, 2006

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The animal kingdom

ANIMALS are creatures of habit and have distinct daily and seasonal patterns of activities. An understanding of these patterns increases our chance of seeing them.

Globally, nature oriented television channels like Discovery, Animal Planet, National Geographic and many more sometimes mislead the viewers by showing a large assembly of animals and birds in the wild. In reality, large assemblies of wildlife are found only in African plains and in Arctic regions. In most of the cases, the aggressive animals are shot in small reserves, private ranches or by baiting. The forests of southeast Asia are dense with poor visibility. On the other hand, other than deer and monkeys, most of the mammals are shy and active at night. That is why so many people have visited the Sundarbans but hardly any of them came across any wildlife.

For saving time and money of the tourists, the forest department has developed a centre at Karamjal forest outpost, a former animal breeding centre five kilometres off the Mongla Port, for a close look at the fauna and flora of the Sundarbans.

On many occasions of my trips to the Sundarbans I have passed by the Karamjal Centre without feeling much attraction to it. But in January this year, I paid a visit to the centre. The first thing which amazed me is the interest of the local people, who throng in hundreds to the centre to have a feeling of the forest. There are some caged animals like deer, monkeys, crocodiles,

pythons and ridley turtle on display, but they are continuously disturbed by the visitors. But it is a good place to watch different mammals in the wild too.

On weekdays, the number of visitors is less and then you can see deer roaming around, even tigers can also be seen walking on the boundary walls.

Why did deer choose such a populous area? These deer are the overpopulated members of the breeding centre, which were freed in the wilderness. The deer got accustomed with the people and tigers followed them. Sometimes the foresters have to fire blank shots to scare away adventurous tigers at night.

It was almost midday when I walked on wooden walkway about four feet clear of the ground that runs through the centre. Tall trees -- Sundari, Kankra, Bain, Ora, Kawra, Passur and Dhundul -- had extended a canopy over the walkway. On the higher canopies I found some passerine birds, busy practicing their sweet notes. I spent some time there and felt the wonder of nature.

At the end of the walkway, we entered a thick undergrowth of hantal bushes. The accompanying forest guard cautioned me that tigers sometimes take shelter in the bush and one of them growled at visitors just a couple of days back.

So I did not want to make the guards nervous by walking further into the bush.

Story & photos: Khasru Chowdhury

