

RISING STARS

Travel

Mountains of Mirik

by Sabah Moyeen

The sun was still a raw ball of fire in the eastern horizon when we groped our way out of doors. It was a typical Indian July day: still hot and humid. A picture of green hills, misty mornings and tall pines rose in my foggy mind. This was going to be my first visit to Mirik, indeed to any hill station, and needless to say, I was excited. The hot fumes from the awakening car broke my day dream and I was pulled into an already crowded car. So began our four hour journey from the heart of Bihar to the outskirts of Bengal.

corn and mustard. It would have been a perfect drive, had the road in some stretches not resembled the surface of the moon. At some places, we were forced to unload in order to let the car pass over the pits and humps, while we progressed on foot and hitchhiked on trucks for a distance of about 6 kilometres. Come to think of it, it was all part of the fun.

After several hours, we stopped at Purna for refreshments. Henceforth, the Bengali lettering on walls and hoardings lent an air of famil-

Mirik was 5000 feet up into the hills. The road up was steep and winding, and it grew foggy by the minute. We unconsciously pulled out sweaters and shawls, gazing out of the window spellbound, as we flew higher and higher into the ethereal world of clouds and waterfalls. It was close to sunset, and the white ghost enveloped us. We had been foolish enough to venture into the hills without fog lights, and we paid for it through worry and apprehension. However, in another 45 minutes we approached our

However, we preferred to rent a cottage down the slope of the hill. It was charming. We had three bedrooms along with dressing rooms, a spacious dining-cum-drawing room, a store and a small terrace. Now for dinner. Many different restaurants were present providing various types of food. They were small and unpretentious. But the food was good and wholesome. That night we slept soundly wrapped in double blankets in the noiseless air conditioning.

The sunlight worked like magic on the landscape. A hundred different shades of green appeared. The lake danced in a confusion of vibrant colours. Psychedelic wooden paddle boats drifted on its tranquil heart. The forest rose majestically high and dense. Narrow paths wind into the cluster of small shed-like shops, restaurants, workshops and pharmacies. The summit of the highest hill now looked empty, now appeared topped with a group of stately chateaus as clouds passed to and fro.

We made our way to the village market toward afternoon. It was surprising to find such a lot of foreign stuff available: both brushes, soap, clothing, sandals — everything apparently smuggled from Nepal.

The shopkeepers were friendly and the people warm. They easily take to strangers and vice versa. By the time the day was over, most of the village knew us by sight and by name. We also visited the chateaus and a large Buddhist temple, garishly decorated, painted in red and gold.

The driver around the area was pleasurable and fulfilling. Coming back to our tourist spot, we went horse-riding and boating. My uncle's elaborate camera and his fancy tactics of taking pictures put many under the impression that we were shooting for a movie.

Rambling through the woods, one can not help but remember the poet's words: 'The woods are lovely dark and deep, but I have promises to keep.' There was so much freedom in the air, you could not blame your imagination for wandering away amidst the trees like a stealthy elf. One just sits and watches overwhelmed with joy and a sense of complete serenity.



Boating on the lake at Mirik; a hill station as yet unfrequented by the hordes of tourists that invade other resorts, Mirik retains a lyrical and pristine charm. —Photo: S Moyeen

The city of Patna slept as we made our way through its dusty roads, the tinkling bells of the numerous temples its lullaby. A few early risers were drinking tea at wayside tea shops. The ganges flowed serene and tranquil a host of saffron-clad men half submerged in its waters joined hands and looked heavenwards chanting prayers. The city was left behind and various small townships whizzed past. There is something so quaint and similar about these towns: the some narrow grey roads, walls covered with neat circles of dried dung, crowds of sleepy schoolchildren, women with long gaily coloured veils and clay pitchers, shoppers, cyclists, and local people grouped around a single newspaper.

As the towns thinned out, the highway came into view, tearing through green paddy fields and golden harvests of

Continuing our journey, we deviated from the highway and went through the village of Ararhia. The scenery and people were both varied; there were lush spots and dry spots, there were fishermen, farmers, peasants, craftsmen, herdsmen. The way up to Siliguri was a stretch of straight good road. We would have picked up speed, but for the numerous dogs, goats, cows and sheep roaming the path at leisure.

Three hours later we found ourselves in Simultala. The air had already become clearer and cooler, but we hardly noticed that — before us rose a terrain of dreamy hills, their vague purple outlines peeping timidly through the curtain of flaky clouds. Round the bend, a vast stretch of tea gardens appeared, a level carpet of dense green, guarded by tall sentinel trees, amidst the backdrop of the immutable hills.

destination in safety.

The village drew up before the tourist area. It was right out of a fairy tale. Colourful wooden houses appeared in the beam of powerful headlights.

A few persistent haggard-eyes tried the patience of dreary-eyed shopkeepers; old wives rocked children to sleep by windows and exchanged the day's gossip across the narrow streets; idlers perched on doorsteps and drifted away to the sound of a distant flute playing. The aroma of food was still heavy in the air. The tourist lodge was set apart from the village. It was hard to decipher much in the dark, except the bushy outline of bordering forests all dressed in a uniform of silver grey moonlight.

The youth hostel was nothing fancy, but nevertheless, clean, fresh and inviting.

Time Off Magic Trickster

By Maria Irene

Invite a friend to breathe on your magic mirror to see what it will tell him. As he breathes on it, sure enough a ghostly message appears. The secret of this is simplicity itself. Before your friend enters the room simply mark the mirror with whatever message you wish him to read (i.e. You are a silly fool) with your finger. Believe it or not this will not show up until he breathes on it.

Challenge a friend to pick up a brush without touching it; your solution is to produce a second brush which you push firmly down into the bristles of the first.

Tell a friend that you have 11 fingers. When he scoffs at this claim, count from 1 to 10 on your fingers, then count backwards saying, "10, 9, 8, 7, 6 — and 5 fingers on the other hand makes 11."

Another party wheeze! Put a glass of water under one of your Dad's hats and announce that you will drink the water without touching the hat. Amidst sounds of disbelief, you crouch down behind the hat hiding your face from view and making slurping sounds as though drinking. Then you stand up and say, "There you are. Someone is bound to lift the hat to see whether the water is gone from the glass. As soon as this happens you calmly pick up the glass and drink without touching the hat — as promised."

Take a piece of paper and a pencil and announce to a friend: "I can write with my left ear." When he challenges you to do so, simply take up the pencil and write "with my left ear."

This is bound to catch somebody out. Ask which of the following two statements is

correct. 'The yolk of an egg is white' or 'the yolk of an egg is white?' Almost certainly you will be told that 'the yolk of an egg is white' is correct, whereupon you point out that the yolk of an egg is yellow.

Another wheeze is to announce that you can sing underwater. When challenged you merely sing the words 'under water' to a popular tune.

You can be sure of getting a laugh at your party with this trick. Take an ordinary object, such as a book or a newspaper, and announce to a guest that you will place it in full view of everyone else, but that you will hypnotise him so that he will not be able to see it. Then, having made a few suitable passes in front of his face, you simply place the object on his head. In that position of course, everyone will be able to see it but the person underneath. Make sure there are no mirrors around, though, or the tables will be turned on you.

You can bet your bottom dollar you can catch a pal out with this gag. Say to him, 'There's only one way of making money.' And when he says, 'What's that then?' as he certainly will, your swift reply is, 'I thought you wouldn't know it.'

Ask a pal if he can write fifty miles under the sea in four words. When he admits defeat, show him the solution: the sea fifty miles.

Easy when you know how, eh?

Well, goodbye for now, and have good fun with these tricks. When you've finished with all of them, be sure to come to me for more.

How Much does the Earth Weigh ???

Contributed by Farshed Mahmud

Owing to the fact that the earth is suspended in space, "weighing" it to us would seem an impossible task. Actually, when we do speak of the weight of the earth, we mean the amount of matter that it consists of or in other words it's mass.

Through intensive research, scientists have found the earth mass to be 6,600 trillion tons or in numerical form, 6,600,000,000,000,000,000 tons (whew!). It is quite natural all of you will be asking how scientists find out the earth's mass to be this.

To do this, scientists used the principle based on the fact that any two objects attract each other. This is what the force of gravity depends on stating two objects are attracted by a force depending on their mass and their distance apart. The bigger the objects, the greater the force that pulls them together. The farther apart they are, the smaller the force.

To measure the actual weight of the earth, the following is done: A small weight is suspended from a string. The exact position of that weight is measured. Now a tonne of lead is brought near the hanging weight.

There is an attraction between the weight and the lead, and this causes the weight to be pulled less than 0.00002mm out of line, and so it is quite obvious that the measuring must be done very carefully.

After this is measured, scientists can use mathematics to figure out the weight of the

earth. They have measured the power of the one tonne lead's attraction on the suspended weight and also the power of the Earth's attraction on the weight.

The relative difference can be calculated and tells them the mass of the Earth.

Golden Lion Tamarin

These tiny monkeys once flourished in the coastal forest of Brazil's southern Rio de Janeiro state. But by the 1960s deforestation and capture-for-sale had winnowed the population to fewer than 900. To prevent extinction, US and European zoos launched a breeding program in 1972. In the past eight years, 90 of the 550 zoo-bred primates have been released at a large wildlife reserve in Rio de Janeiro state, where most are doing well—and reproducing with wild golden lion tamarins.



The Happy Village: A Fable

By Sumaira Azim

My desk is beside a window, and often birds come and sit on the window sill as I study. One of them spends 6 months in the villages of Bangladesh, and the other 6 months in the city. He is a chatterbox, and tells me everything he sees. One year, he returned to the city after only one month away.

"What happened?" I asked.

He then told me this story. In the village that he had gone to, a certain farmer was richer than everyone else. As a result, everyone was jealous of him

and hated him. But they were all vain and would not help one another. The ferryman would not let the rich farmer cross the river in his boat; the rich farmer would not sell his rice to his fellow villagers; the shop-keeper would cheat his customers, and so on. Soon, the village was a very unhappy place. The people were mean, and starving.

"I did not want to sing for them," the bird finished, "so I left."

The next year he came back

early too.

"Oh on," I exclaimed, "not another mean village."

"Quite the contrary," stated the robin. He had gone back to the same village, he said, and had nearly fallen off the branch of the tree he was sitting on with astonishment. The village had changed. What had happened was this: the people had fallen into such a bad state that they had been forced to help one another. Slowly, they had realized that it is much nicer being kind than mean and much more profitable too. The

ferryman, the rich farmer, the shopkeeper and all the others were all best friends now. The village was flourishing and happy. "So," the robin ended, "I have decided that I will stay there forever. I am old now, and cannot take all this flying around. I just came to say farewell."

I patted him for the last time and he flew off. However happy that village was, I am sure it is much happier with him singing there.

ONE OF THE CROWD

Zaki Omar

TO be caught up in the excitement of other people is an unbelievable experience. I was in the middle of an ecstatic crowd once. It all happened on December 4 last year when a few of my friends and I, bored with two months of holidays, decided to go and see what was happening in the city. A hartal had been called till 2:00 pm and would be followed by public meetings.

Living in the outskirts I had been basically out of touch with the heart of the city where the movement against Ershad was going on strongly. I had always observed hartals from far away. On this day when my friend asked me if I would like to accompany him to the Press Club 'where all the action goes on' as he said, I accepted, more out of boredom than interest.

No cars could be taken because of the hartal; so we

had to take five rickshaws. I had never really enjoyed a rickshaw ride before because of the thought that a mad bus driver might be heading straight for me. But I had nothing to worry about that day, despite the five-mile distance between Khabib and the Press Club. There were no buses, no cars, no taxis, only swift-moving lines of rickshaws, all headed towards the city. And above all, people, hundreds of people, carrying banners, shouting slogans, moving with one accord in the same direction.

I had never seen such a multitude of people before as I did that day. There must have been a couple of hundred thousand people there. Not all supporting the same parties. But all supporting the fall of an autocratic government. To tell you the truth, if Ershad had seen what these people

thought of him, I am sure he would have cried. He would have seen people burning his pictures and effigies. Well, that is not that bad you say, but what if I were to tell you that there were garlands of dead rats hung around the neck?

There was one sight I will never forget. At first I could not understand what it was, but when I did I had to laugh. On a cart came a female mannequin dressed up in a sari. A lot of make-up had been applied to make the excess obvious. There was a sign around her neck but it was too far for me to read. Two men stood on either side of the mannequin, each holding a sandal in their hands. Each man took turns slapping the cheek facing him. The men coordinated their actions so well that one sandal was always slapping the face. As the cart neared, I noticed the sign

around the neck: 'FAST LADY'. This, to me, was the ultimate humiliation.

Up to this point we had all been moving as one body of people. Suddenly I realised that slowly people were streaming in different directions and that the once massive body was breaking up into small groups, heading towards their party meetings. Thus some marched to Gulsina to hear Hasina, some to Zero Point to hear Mennon, and some to Gulab Shah Mazar to hear Khaleda Zia.

I joined in the shouting that day, but I hoped that the party leaders understood that the unity of the people had been brought about not because of the love they felt for party politics, but because they all wanted the same thing: the downfall of Ershad, the restoration and recognition of the rights of the people of Bangladesh.

SHIULI WAS HER NAME

by Samya Sattar

My nose was too big, my eyes too small, my hair too flat and my legs too short. I would never look good in my new dress. The party was scheduled at 7:30. Quick, have to get my hair done. I glanced at my English and Maths assignments staring me in the face. Should I skip the fancy hairdo? Nah...the homework can wait.

I went outside to find the garage empty. My father had taken the blue car and the other one had gone for repairs. Aaargh! I threw one of my usual tantrums and started off on foot.

As I was accustomed to having a chauffeur take me around anywhere I desired, I did not know the streets well. I kept cursing my fate for not having a car when I most needed it. I ended up in an alley. There were a number of shacks knitted closely together, with about twenty people living in each. A baby was crying somewhere. Elsewhere I heard a man shouting and a woman hollering relentlessly as if she was being beaten. There was a foul smell coming from the pile of refuse. I did not like this place. I wanted to go back to my air-conditioned bedroom where I could lie on my soft

bed.

A girl who seemed about my age came up to me. Her hair was matted and her sari looked like one of the rage my bua uses to wipe the kitchen floor. Besides she had an overwhelming body odour. My nose twitched. Yet underneath all the filth she had a certain something. She was beautiful in every way.

Shiuli was her name. My normal reaction would have been to shoo her away and run for a rickshaw. But, somehow, something kept me back. I wanted to speak to Shiuli. He had amazingly expressive eyes.

There seemed to be a lifetime of pain and misery hidden behind them.

Shiuli told me her story. Her father had died when she was young and her mother had remarried. Until then they were happy. The step-father unfortunately was the stereotypical drunkard. He beat her and hardly ever gave her anything to eat. Unable to bear the tension at home, Shiuli ran away. A nice policeman gave her plastic bags to sell. Apart from the income she earned from that, she begged. Another time she met a not-so-nice police man who abused her. Anyway, she ended up in the slums that she was living in now. Although it was filthy and crowded, it was not all bad. An old woman who cared for sent her to school. Shiuli was learning to read. She seemed truly happy.

I walked back home, no longer worried about my hair. I felt an emptiness in my heart. "Don't worry," I said to myself, "The party tonight will be great." However, my attempts of offering solace to myself were of no avail. I felt utterly useless. Shiuli who had had a life with constant hardships was given a chance to prove herself and she was happy. I had had a pampered life where the biggest problems were not finding the correct shade of nail-polish. Unlike Shiuli, I had countless opportunities to learn and make myself useful, which I had been throwing away.

Oh no! Almost 7 o'clock. Have to get dressed for the party. My dress lay on the bed and my books on the desk. It was a choice which would mark my life. I went to my desk, sat on the chair and started working. I would miss the party but it did not matter...I had already missed too much.

QUIZ CLUB

The club is pleased to announce that answers are beginning to arrive. If you want to be among our next winners don't hesitate! Pick up a pencil right now and start jotting down the answers to these questions. Some might be as plain as can be, but some might take a little searching through the encyclopedia or dictionary. And if you send in the answers by next Friday, your name might be picked out from all others to win a copy of your favorite book. Don't forget to put your name and address! Write now to:

Editor, Rising Stars
The Daily Star
28/1 Tounbee Circular Road
Dhaka-1000

Quiz No 3

- What is Bangladesh's national flower?
- In which year was Mary, Queen of Scots, beheaded, and by whom?
- What were the last two states to join the United States of America?
- Name a Spanish literature character who charged at windmills.
- Which famous composer was deaf?
- What year did Rabindranath Tagore win the Nobel Prize for literature?
- What were the names of the two first brothers of aviation?
- Whose daughter is singer Ferdousi Rahman?
- What were the first words to be spoken on the telephone?
- What colours did Biman have before green and red?

(Answers in two weeks)

Answers to Quiz No.1 (16.8.91)

- Sophocles
- Louis Kahn
- Jeremy Irons
- Cyril Radcliffe
- Neil Armstrong
- Heights
- Public address system
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Chloroplasts
- World War I

THE LIFE OF A FIRE

by Munazah Alam

With a sudden leap I burst into life
And shatter the silence with a crackling sound.
I slice the air like a sharpened knife
No rope nor ties can keep me bound.

Destruction is written on my every flare:
Greedy I consume all those on my path.
A burning smell greets the air
As I roar over the landscape in fury and wrath.

With the wind reining an spurring me on
I dance all the way rising and falling.
Leaping and twisting forests I slay
With my red and blue flames creeping and crawling

Swirling and jumping I change my shape every moment
Forming black holes that appear and disappear.
Laughing and jeering, the whole world I torment,
Filling Nature's heart with dread and fear.

The deafening roar announces my victory:
But alas, that is followed by a weeping sky.
My crackling flames become smaller and smaller,
And reluctantly, sadly, slowly I die.