

Tourism in Bangladesh

Sunderbans: Where the Bengal Tiger Roams Freely

By Helal Uddin Ahmed

AMONGST the forests of Bangladesh, the mangrove forest 'Sunderban' of Khulna region; the forests of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts and the 'Shalban' encompassing Dhaka, Mymensingh, Tangail, Jamalpur and Sherpur are the major ones.

Amongst these forests, Sunderban occupies a very special place. Its physical features, river network, innumerable variety of trees, huge reservoir of fish, and above all the spotted Chitral Deer and the world famous Royal Bengal Tiger have endowed the forest with vast riches. No other forest has so much forest related resources as Sunderban. The Honey and Wax of Sunderban is

famed throughout the country. Sunderban is a mangrove forest. Compared to other forests it is much more productive. A lot of people (Mowals) are engaged in extracting Honey and Wax. The job is a seasonal one; Work starts from 1st April and lasts up to 30th June. Although dozens of people die because of tiger bites each year, as Honey-collection is a very profitable vocation lots of 'Mowals' continue to live on it.

The people who collect 'Jhinuk', are known as 'Jongra Khuta.' Jhinuk is found both within the forest and also by the seaside. After collection these are sold at Hats and Bazars. By burning 'Jhinuk', lime can be produced.

'Golpata' plays a very prominent role in rural economy. For building huts it is incomparable. Thousands of people are engaged in extracting Gol leaves, their transportation and marketing. The huts built from 'Golpata' is much more durable than those covered with grass.

'Hental' tree is used as pillars for huts, and in the man-chas. Amongst fuelwoods 'Bola' is very popular among the poorer sections because of its economic viability. 'Garan', is a high quality fuel wood. It is



The King: No lions in the Sunderbans.

also used as pillars, in betel leaf cultivation, and in fences. In addition, its balm is used for colouring nets.

The use of 'Amur' wood is widespread in handicrafts; 'Singra', 'Jhana', Kirpa, etc trees are used as fuel wood and as pillars. Extraction of 'Nal', 'Hogla', 'Patipata', 'Chhan', 'Hell' grass and 'Ulu' grass etc. provides profitable employment.

Almost 73% of wood production of Sunderban consists of 'Sundari' wood. It is used in house-building, pools, culverts, boats, launch, bus, truck, electrical poles and in various mills and factories. A large percentage of demand for fuelwood in the country is met from this wood. It is also used as raw material for Khulna Hardboard Mill.

Around 16% of the wood produced in Sunderban comprises of 'Geoa'. It is used as raw materials at Khulna Newsprint Mills. Besides, the largest match factories of the country use it as raw material.

Kakra, Keora, Bain, Dhundal, etc account for around 11% of wood produced in Sunderban. They are used in construction work, furniture,

agri-equipment, toys etc. They are also widely used as fuelwood.

Sunderban is located by the side of the sea and during day time it is inundated by tidal waters. The water is naturally salty. According to differences in salt composition, the forest is divided into three regions.

The most lively and fast growing trees grow in the region with least saltiness. As the proportion of salt increases, the shrubs are found in larger quantities.

Amongst the fauna that are seen in Sunderban the outstanding ones are Royal Bengal Tiger, 'Chitra Deer', Monkey, Jackal, Pigs, Shajaru, 'Udbiral', Kathbiral, Crocodile, Dolphin, Shark and various types of snakes.

The birds include native birds such as Kingstork, Snipe, Hawk, Baj, Machhranga, Gangcheel, Madantak, Gangkabutar, Parrots, Owl, Harial, Ghooghu, Doyel, Shalik etc. During winter a massive flock of foreign birds come to this forest. These include Swan, Grey Swan, Jhatl Hansh, Kal Hansh, Ranga Hansh,

various rivers and canals (by means of boats, nets and barshi). In winter, a large number of fishermen come from different areas of the country to catch fish from the char areas which surface in the sea coast. These fishes are dried in the chars and then supplied to far-flung areas of the country. Fresh fish is marketed locally and frozen fish, which include shrimps, are exported.

Sunderban is located in the southwest of Bangladesh between 21°31' and 22°30' north latitude and 89° to 90° east longitude. The average height of this forest area is 5 feet above sea level. Innumerable rivers dot the landscape and as a result the region is made up of numerous islets.

The forest has an area of 571502 hectare. Of this 401600 hectare is covered by trees, the rest 169902 hectare is strewn with rivers and canals.



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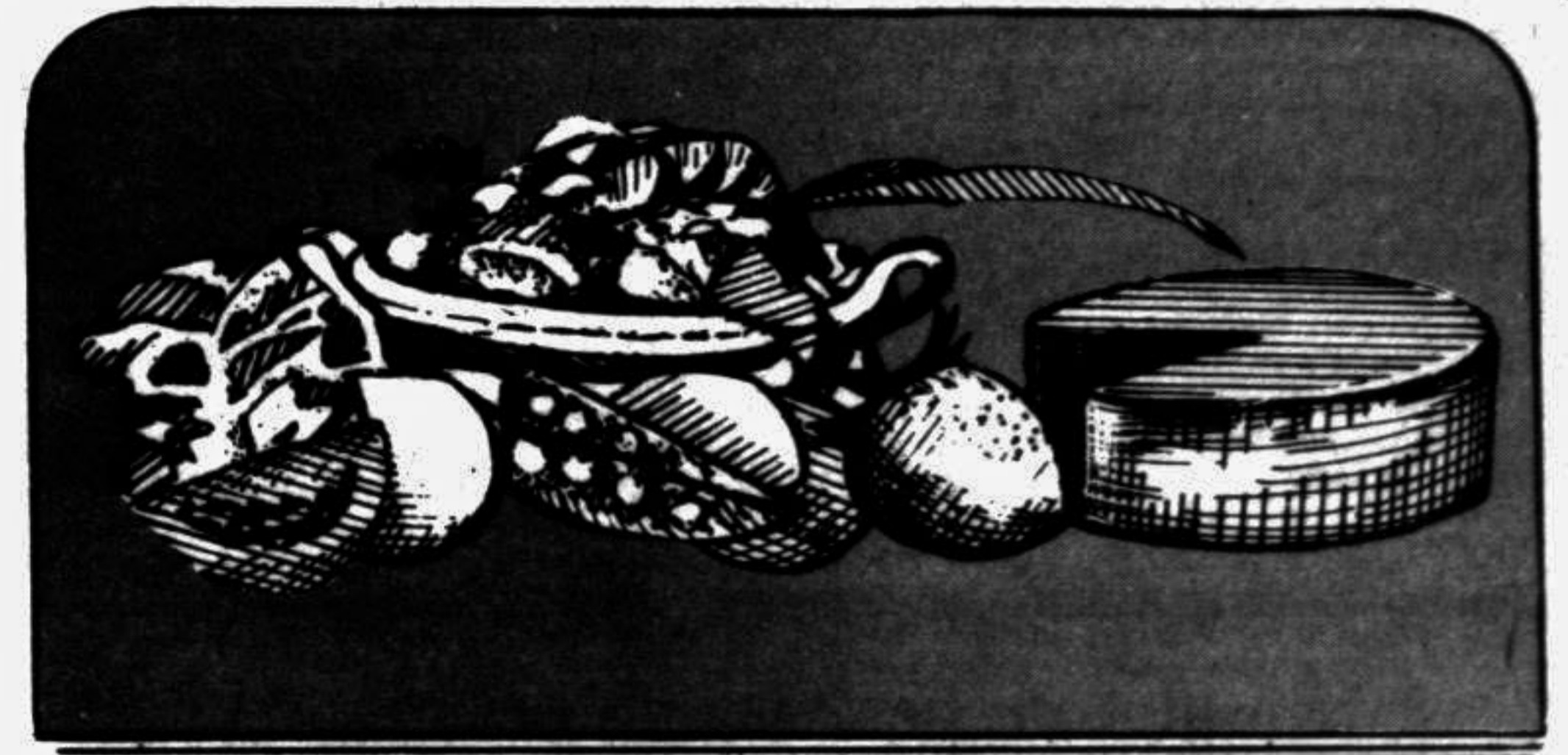
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