

Star Holiday

DHAKA SUNDAY JULY 27, 2003

next in line



Chiang Mai



"I feel like flying"



A top view from the hillock beside the lake



The lonely road to the lake



The Blue Lily Lake

LOCATION > MOULVIBAZAR
CATEGORY > FAMILY / ADVENTURE

Lake



The blue lilies

We knew there was a lake. We had heard about its breathtaking beauty. We also heard that it was far away into a tea garden. But none of us except our driver Selim had been there.

We felt like scouting for the lake and after a very late lunch set out by microbus. We stopped by Sri Mongol town, and picked up some directions. And then we moved on.

Soon, we entered the tea estate. On its both sides were hills, most of them covered with tea plants. But some were not and there stood long trees wildly growing skyward. The green around this time of the year was something special. The trees were all awash with rain, looking as youthful as teenage girls, beaming with vigour and joy.

The road snaked through the garden and everything took a red hue in afternoon sunlight. The sunbeams forking through

in long streaks.

Tea pickers were getting back from work, traditional baskets on their back with leaves. Their sun-baked bodies wrapped in traditional Monipuri dress created a new image against the emerald green of the gardens and forests. It was now high time for plucking and they were into a frenzy of activities.

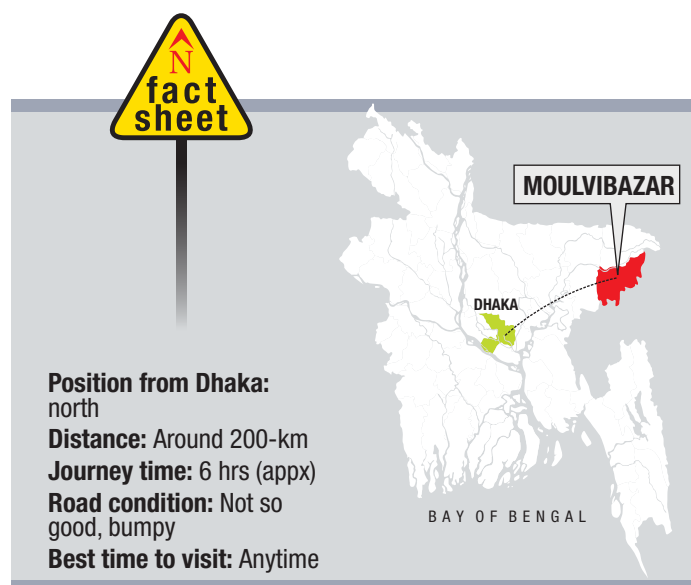
We must have travelled for just less than an hour, but it felt like ages. Our bodies ached from the bumpy ride. We could not wait any longer for the lake. So, after the next turn, we stopped at the sound of brittle laughter and met the sight of a bunch of girls hardly 16 years old. They must have been the children of the tea garden workers -- their skin shiny black, their eyes burning bright with delight, their steps as light as their soul. The light green *kochu shak* in their hands contrasted with their vermilion dresses.

We asked them if they knew the way to the lake -- the Madhabpur Lake. "Yes," one of them shook head and showed over a hill. We proceeded with a hope. The bungalow of the tea estate manager came on the way -- a picturesque white colonial thing atop a tilla.

We were going uphill and half a kilometre down the dirt road turned again. We came face to face with a high embankment ahead. That must be it!

As we climbed up the embankment, the beauty hit us with all its fury. We stood frozen, our voices muffled as if the slightest of noise would ripple away the splendour.

They call it Madhabpur Lake. But the one and only name that could come to our mind is the Blue Lily Lake. Hundreds of blue lilies were in full bloom all over the lake like stars on a peach black night. Somehow, it did not have the tang of elation.



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

Rather, a calm and quite spread over the lake in a chador of sadness. The mood reflecting on the still black water. Often, a small breeze picked up, and the mirror image broke.

"Take them bibi," the voice brought us back to reality. We

were so engrossed in the lake that we had not noticed this man. A thin man in shorts, barefoot, stringy legs and hands. A tea garden worker, over 50. "Take them," he smiled at my seven-year old daughter, holding out a bunch of blue

lilies.

Amal, as we came to know his name, said the lake has a mystery. It spreads away for three and a half kilometres into India and you can row all the way into the neighbouring country. On moonlit nights, a lonely boatman wades through the lake, nobody knows who he is.

"He is a spirit," says Amal. We believed him; for how could we not standing in front of this lake perched high among the hills. We climbed up a hill for a better view and once again held our breath. The lake spreads there with its tranquil bounty. A late afternoon cumulous gathered in the west and its reflection on the water made it looking mysterious. Only here can a spirit wander to discover its lost life.

Among the trees on the hill, we found some sawed away trunks to sit on. Our back was to a vastly stretching woodland.

And we could hear a symphony of bird songs. From the woods came the tweekers and rhapsodised over the lake. It felt that we were in another world, the songs are unreal, coming from the bottom of the soul with a pall of hollowness. We sat mesmerised.

Then as suddenly as they started, the songs stopped. In the eastern sky, a big round moon appeared. It was not dark enough to turn it golden. But it still hung there alright. Blessing the earth with a placid view. The darkness came next, turning the lake even mysterious. The ripples prattling about an ancient mysterious spirit.

In the pale moonlight, we witnessed the magic reality sitting under an ancient moon.

INAM AHMED with KHOSRU CHOWDHURY
photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

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

Travel tips

Leeches are rampant in the forest, especially if it is monsoon. So, take a concoction of grounded 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 paracetamol 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, don't forget to take at least a 400mm zoom.

Tour offers

- Thai Airways Summer Holidays**
Chiang Mai 3days/2nights
Business class: From \$586 to \$662 (Depending on hotel class and accommodation)
Economy class: From \$395 to \$482 (Depending on hotel class and accommodation)
- Travelhouse limited**
The Speldours of Egypt
4 nights starting from \$927 per person + taxes. 8 nights Cairo-Alexandria starting from \$1,107
- Emirates Airlines**
Holiday Package: Dhaka-Dubai-Dhaka
Economy class ticket, meet and assistance at Dubai Airport, Airport-Hotel-Airport transfers, 3 nights Hotel accommodation, Additional 10kg free baggage on return flight. Prices: \$600 (Twin sharing) and \$695 (Single).



Flowers all the way



When the evening spread into the night