

Star Holiday

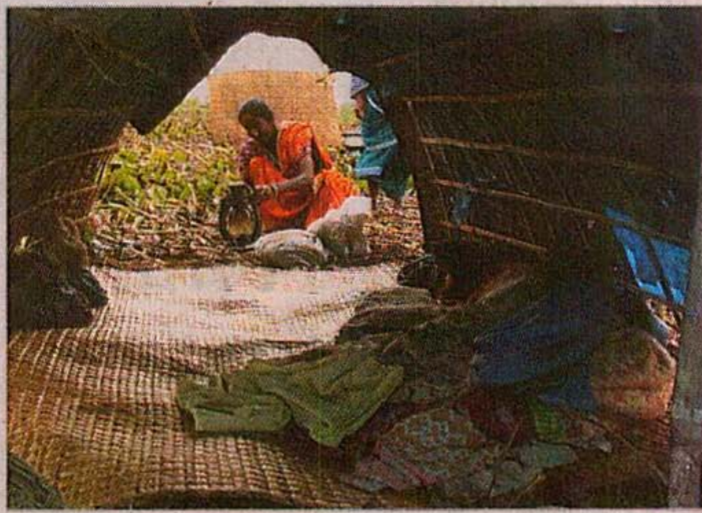
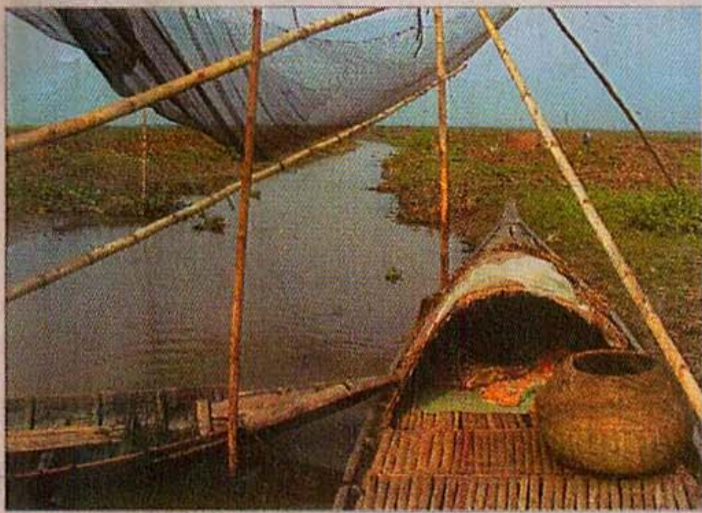
DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 30, 2004

PACKAGE TOURS

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LOCATION > GOPALGANJ CATEGORY > FAMILY

Chanderbeel Magic

CONDENSED dew was dropping on the corrugated tin shed. I could hear it from the warmth of the bed and felt too lazy to get up. Yet I had to. As I open the door, the scene greeted me with a strong sense.

My view was blocked to a few yards because of heavy mists. The betel nut orchard, some very old buildings left by the former Zamindars, lonely light posts

with bulbs still burning all this gave the look of dreamy painting. It was not that chilly as one can anticipate on a late January morning.

Inam and Zakir had little time to waste. To capture the mood of the nature they were moving along the narrow walkways like ghosts, photographing every possible opportunity. Birds were all around although invisible.

But from their calls, we knew there were flameback woodpeckers, black headed orioles, grey tits, jangle babblers, pied mynas, tree pies and owlets up on the branches.

After a quick breakfast we rode on our microbus and our friend Anisuzzaman Khan, an eminent field biologist, guided us to the Bou Bazar. It is a unique market mainly run by village women. We enter the bazaar and were amazed to see the bold ladies selling winter crops, fish, molasses and what not.

The wide variety of fish

caught our attention. I have never seen such a wide ranging offer of indigenous fish. As water recedes from the vast Chander Beel, an adjacent wetland, the fishermen community enjoy a fish bonanza catching everything edible from fish to turtle.

We counted the species -- koi, shing, magur, taki, shole, gazar, boal, kalibaus, rui, meni, khailsha, chanda, mala, dhela, panti, kajali, batashi, tatkini, rayek, foli, chital, ban, tara baim, gutum, ayer, tengra and so goes the list.

While Zakir was engrossed in



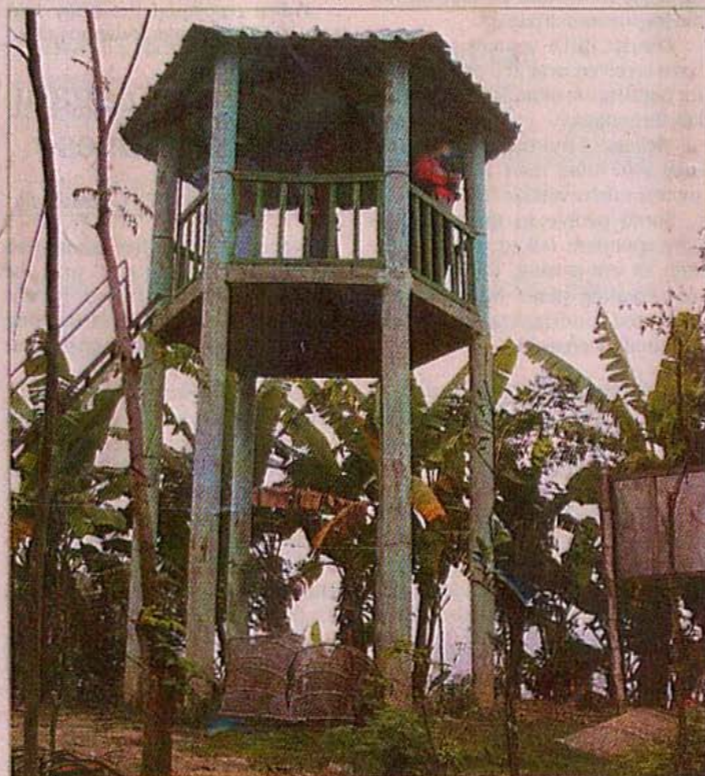
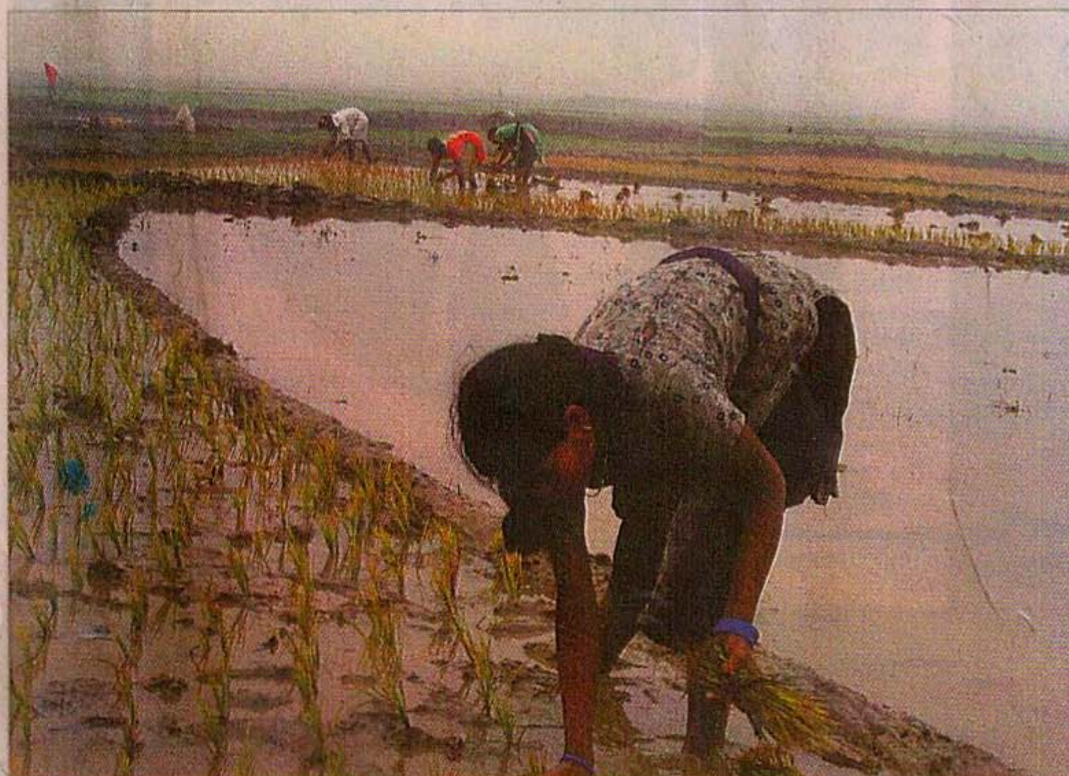
seedlings. We saw some birds around; egrets, paddy pipit, drongo, myna, beecatcher and cormorants. But the most fascinating of them were the engendered marsh harriers.

Boys were busy catching snakehead, climbing perch, eels and other fishes in the small creek. The vastness of the wetland and its cheerful people injected a feeling of happiness in our souls before we retired to lunch.

KHASRU CHOWDHURY
photo INAM AHMED



Position from Dhaka: Southwest, close to Gopalganj town
Distance: Via Faridpur about 186km, via Mawa about 120 km
Road condition: Good
Places of interest: The ruins of Rajarams' residence at Khalia, Charmuguria for primate watchers
Caution: Be respectful to the local community and their culture. Take care during driving to avoid collision with cyclists and livestock



taking pictures. Inam could not resist his journalistic inquisitiveness. His finding is an elderly woman rice seller, who had long been in the business and brought up two of her daughters, one an army nurse.

Most of the women vendors support their families from their own income. Like any market place, Bou Bazar is humming with activities. While we felt intoxicated by the sweet small of chitagar (crude molasses), patali gur (concentrated date juice), crude tobacco leaves and fresh vegetables, Anis discovered a colourful gecko, a common local specimen.

After an hour, we were thirsty for tea. In this part of the country, people are fond of a lot of concentrated milk in their tea. We were also offered the same -- nice smelling and so refreshing that we could not resist to comeback here in the evening in quest of tea.

Faridpur is a liberal area. Bold

presence of womenflock, smart girls on the roads and markets show that liberal attitude of the community.

We crossed Katakhal, a canal that connects Chander Beel and Modhumati river. The canal was dug during the British Raj to transport jute and fish to Kolkata markets. The canal divided Chanderbeel and Jalirpar habitation. On the other bank, a Dolphin watch tower built with the financial support of IUCN under the SEMP project stands tall. We climbed on the tower and waited for a while sighting only one Gangeting dolphin.

The morning mist has now given way to bright sunshine. We reached the famous vast wetland of Chander Beel but not before crossing a tiny creek through a swinging bamboo bridge.

The beel is almost dry with some patches of marshy land. Shallow tube wells pump water for farming. Men, women and children were planting paddy

Budget

Tour cost for 6 persons.
Microbus A/C @ Tk 1600
for two days - Tk 3200
Fuel and ferry toll - Tk 3000
Food and 2-night stay - Tk 5000

Travel tips

- Light-soled shoes.....
- Sunscreen lotion.....
- Sun hat.....
- Sunglasses.....
- Binoculars.....
- Flashlight.....
- Camera gears.....
- Life jacket.....