

Star Holiday



DHAKA SUNDAY JUNE 13, 2004

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LOCATION > GOPALGANJ CATEGORY > FAMILY


Fair of the Nude Pagla

WE, the city dwellers, have long been forgotten the mouthwatering taste of fresh fishes and vegetables. Our cook-cum caretaker, a middle aged clumsy mover well-wrapped with dirty rug, when appeared before us, we had very little faith upon his cooking ability. But he cooked well our meals. Although we took a hurried lunch, but could not resist relishing every item presented in the lunch table.

Our next destination was the *nengta paglar mela*, about 7 km from our dormitory. *Nengta Pagla*, a serious devotee of the Hindu goddess *Kali*, used to wear nothing like his mentor in




fact sheet


GOPALGANJ
DHAKA
BAY OF BENGAL

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

could watch the activities of the other bank through the bamboo-thicket. The water flowing from the stream apparently looked crystal clear...ducklings were floating at their will... soft shell *chitra* turtles were sun basking on the stern of the sunken boat... girls were washing clothes and taking bath...Sparse growth of village residences well covered with trees were all around us. Winter crops, especially yellow flowers of mustard oil marked the horizon. Liquid notes of singing birds like bulbuls, orioles, warblers, babblers were breaking the silence. We took the road again and after a while turned left to cross the bridge to reach

to *mela* area. Other than some rickshaw vans, not many vehicles were there. We found some long-haired *kirtonias* (a community used to sing Hindu mythology based songs) and came to know from them that the *mela* place is actually a small village market place and becomes overcrowded during only *mela* time.

They further informed us that more people from south-western areas gather during *mela* time. But in the last two years, they could not organize the events properly because of the gravious incidence of time bomb attack of Baniachang church, which is hardly 7 km from *mela* area. This year, police and villagers vigilated there but

grim shadow of death threat is still prevailing. Fortunately life always takes its own course. People are trying to overcome the gruesome trauma and reunite themselves to perform the age-old tradition.

By the roadside, we found blacksmiths engaged in making various household tools for moulding cast iron. Shops for making and repairing musical instruments were also there. In the *mela* area, most of the make shift shops were marketing goods to attract the womenfolk and children. So, all the colors from the spectrum were there. The stalls where printing materials were being sold, were mostly decorated with the posters of the

Indian film actors and actresses and religious goddess. Poorly printed books were mostly based on *puranic* stories, *panchali* and *panjikas*. But the most interesting stalls were of sweetmeats. All kinds of sweetmeats as one can anticipate were available there. As the *mela* got life after dusk, we did not waste our time in the sleeping *mela*.

We rushed toward the *kalimandir* believed to the biggest in Bangladesh. As there was no road, not even an earthen one, we had to go through the local people's residences. It appeared to us by observing the people that their overall health condition is better that that of most of our countrymen, though they are always living under the threat of communal violence.

Further down to the south, we came across a little raised courtyard where we found a banyan tree and a tin-shed temple under that tree. We came to know that this place was the place where *nengta pagla* used to meditate.

Little later, we found the so-called biggest *kalimandir*. It is situated in the flood plain which spreads about four acres of land. The *mandir* looks more like a school than a *mandir*, a long lined one storied building roofed by corrugated tin. We were amazed to observe, even in that late hour of the day, a lot of activities which were going on there. At the entrance, some ladies were making marigold garland for the effigy of different gods and goddess placed inside the temple. *Kirtonias* were singing mythical lyrics and some devotees were listening to them with closed eyes.

Anisuzzaman, our biologist friend, informed me that these low lying areas are considered as most poisonous snake infested areas in Bangladesh. Snakes like cobras, specially Bengal cobras (Monocellate cobra) find the wetland as ideal habitat and in the rainy season many people are reported to be bitten to death by this deadly serpent in this area.

Among the devotees, we found a very interesting person, previously known by Anis, who had been bitten ten times and out of them, six times by cobras! According to him, the juice of ipomoea leaves along with green banana intake delay the action of the poison.

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KHASRU CHOWDHURY
photo STAR



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

Travel tips

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

the late 19th century. The people of local communities, as most of them are scheduled caste Hindus, have great faith in his spiritual charm. Every year during his '*Tirodhan*' (death) anniversary, both the Christian and Hindu communities arrange a religious fair. Fair lasts for three days and thousands of people crowd over the area for performing various religious rituals. *Jatra* (open air theatre), *Nam Kirtan* are performed throughout the night. The biggest *kali* temple of Bangladesh is situated just a km south of the '*Mela*' area.

We took driving about 7 km on the Takerhat-Gopalganj highway and turned toward south. The metal road required very careful driving since it was very slim. Although the situation was scary but the fast changing panorama was amazingly beautiful. Especially a small creek beside our left always drew our attention. For a while we stopped our microbus and got down on the steep of the western bank of the stream. We

