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# **RIISING STARS**

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**W**HEN it comes to celebrating the New Year, Bangladesh Astronomical Association (BAA) is definitely unique. Instead of the typical dancing and drinking that many organisations offer, BAA takes people of all age groups to remote areas of Bangladesh to see with the aid of telescope, the first sunrise of the New Year and also the night sky.

They first started this unique way of celebrating the New Year in 2001, when they went to Saint Martin's Island. In 2002, 2003 and 2004 they celebrated the New Year by going to the Sundarbans, Keokaradong Mountain and Nijhum Dwip respectively. As for this year, 2005, they went to Tetulia, the Northern-most point of Bangladesh. The programme titled "Surjo Utshob 2005", commenced on 30 December 2004 and continued till 2 January 2005.

This year about 40 people from all walks of life participated in "Surjo Utshob 2005." At the pre-departure briefing session on 29 December 2004, the organisers tried to scare us by talking about the cold in Tetulia, and how we would have to walk for miles with our rucksacks, and face considerable hardship with accommodation etc. Nevertheless, none of us withdrew from the programme, and so it would be fair to call us die-hard adventure-seekers!

It was on 30 December 2004 that all the participants assembled at Kalabagan field in order to depart for Tetulia. Departure was scheduled for 7pm, but as the coach company followed BST (Bangladesh STRETCHABLE Time), we ended up departing at 9pm. On our way to Tetulia we crossed Jamuna Bridge at around 11.30pm, and it was an awesome sight to see. We had a brief stop at a restaurant in Sirajganj where we had our dinner, and after that we travelled non-stop to Tetulia. It was at 6am on 31 December 2004, after a 9-hour journey, that we arrived in Tetulia.

The very first thing that impressed us when we arrived in Tetulia was the Kazi & Kazi Tea Estate, the place where we stayed throughout the trip. Contrary to all the negative aspects that the organisers scared us about, we found that it had well-furnished rooms and that it was very picturesque. Finding the surroundings breathtaking, the participants who had cameras with them started to get busy taking snaps.

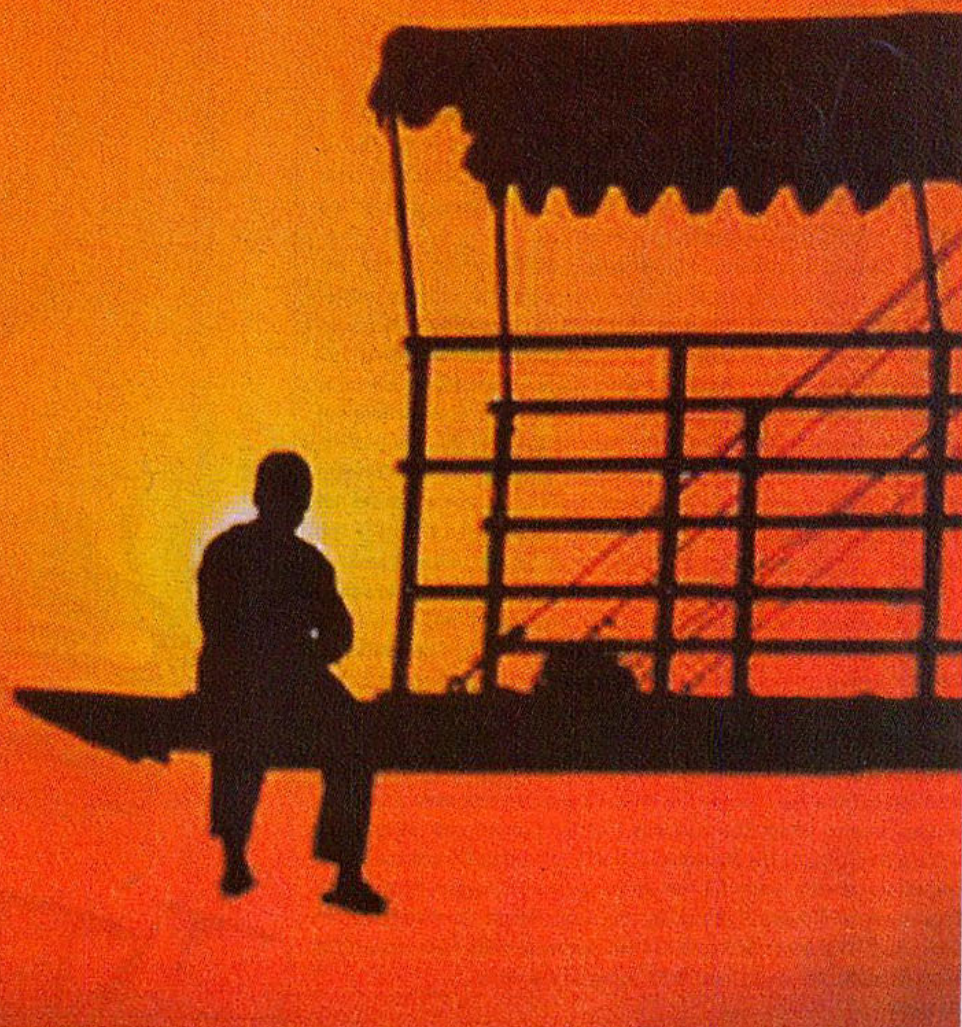
Breakfast was served to us precisely at 8am. Some of the participants, who found it difficult to sleep during the overnight journey, fell asleep in their comfy beds, and consequently they were late for breakfast. On completion of breakfast we were given a tour of the tea gardens. The manager of the tea gardens informed us that they only produce organic tea in Tetulia. In other words, at no stage in producing the tea are artificial chemicals used. This was refreshing to hear considering that in most other places chemicals are heavily used. At one point of our tour of the tea gardens, the manager asked us not to cross a certain white stone, as it was the demarcation of Bangladesh's border with India. Remembering the stories that we had read in newspapers that India's BSF (Border Security Force) can be brutal to trespassers, none of us even dared to go near the white stone!

Unfortunately, we didn't go to the factory where tea is processed, as the manager informed us that tea isn't processed at this time of the year. From the tea gardens he took us to see a nearby dairy farm. The aspect that pleased us most about the dairy farm was that the manure of the animals was being used to make bio-gas. We were also taken to see a nearby eco-park that came to us as a pleasant surprise. Seeing the bio-gas plant and the eco-park, it became apparent to us that the people of Tetulia are much more environmentally conscious than us who live in Dhaka.

At 12pm lunch was served to us. Just as the organisers had told us, we were only given vegetarian dishes to eat. Initially we were all a bit hesitant to have vegetarian food, but after realising how tasty the food was we started to dig in. After lunch, the organisers decided to take us to Dinajpur to see the famous Kantanagar Temple. The journey to Dinajpur took two hours, and along

## **Surjo Utshob 2005: A unique experience**

By Sayeed Mahmud Nizam



the way we all played "Antakshari." We sang a few songs well, but most of them were definitely nothing but noise pollution!

We reached Kantanagar Temple at 3pm. The moment we saw the temple we were all thoroughly impressed with its aesthetical beauty. One of our fellow participants of the tour, Rashed Bhai, had done a part of his Masters degree on this temple, and so he started to explain to us its significance. Apparently, it took 48 years to build the temple. It is famous for its exterior that consists of terracotta tiles that represent flora and fauna, mythology of Mahabharata and Ramayana, the life of people of that time period etc.

Around 7pm we returned back to Tetulia. We quickly had a few snacks, as we had to prepare for the main part of the programme. All the participants voluntarily helped the organisers to make final preparations to welcome the New Year. Once

the telescopes were installed, the organisers showed us various stars. The young participants really enjoyed this part of the programme. This was clearly reflected from the way that they were fondly looking at the telescopes and their inquisitive nature. Who knows, one day, one of those youngsters might become Bangladesh's Neil Armstrong!

At 12am, the New Year began, and the best place on earth to be was probably - Tetulia. Fanushes (a form of hot-air balloon) were released and they illuminated the night-sky. Candles were lit on the banks of a stream that ran through the tea estate, and this created a wonderful sight. Everybody thoroughly enjoyed the spectacle. We didn't manage to get much sleep, as we were up again at 4am in order to view the first sunrise of the New Year. After a long wait the sun finally rose, and it was a sight worth the wait. We

all welcomed it by singing various carols, releasing balloons etc.

After having our breakfast at 7.30am, an art competition was held for students of a local school. We also drew pictures with the school children, and found that in some cases, the children drew better than us! Prizes were later distributed amongst everybody for participating.

Just like all good things come to an end, so did our trip to Tetulia. Before coming back to Dhaka, a raffle draw was held in which a few participants won a package holiday to Bandarban. By participating in "Surjo Utshob 2005", not only did we celebrate the New Year in a unique manner, but we also had plenty of fun, laughter and camaraderie. Although "Surjo Utshob 2006" is many months away, we are all already eagerly looking forward to it! If you are a diehard adventure-seeker, don't forget to join us, as you'll have an experience that you'll cherish forever!