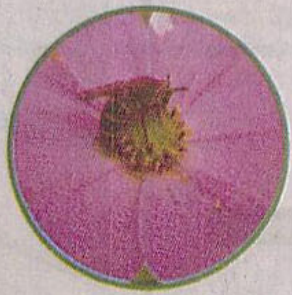


Star

# HOLIDAY



DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 1, 2005

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## Flames in the mind

**W**HEN we saw our shadows staring at us, we knew we had made a mistake. Well, not only one but quite a few.

We did not know where we were. Actually we were lost and we could not see anything around because a dense fog had enveloped us. And we knew it was not wise of us to have set out on a winter night.

Now as we stepped down from the car to find a soul to ask the way, we almost jumped out of our skins as we found long dark figures standing in front of us. It took us quite a few seconds to realise they were not ghosts, only our shadows. The fog was so dense that shadows created by the car headlights had been projected on the fog hanging like a cinema screen. I had never experienced such a thing before. To make the situation even eerie, there were small fireballs, dimly visible, in the distance. We did not know what those were but guessed that the vast misty sea was actually a potato field and the villagers had lit small fires to keep warm while guarding their crops.

After a lot of arguments about which way to go, we finally saw a Baby Taxi pattering through the fog. The driver must have thought of us a bunch of bandits and tried to speed away the moment he saw us. We stood in the middle of the road like a suicide squad and waved frantically at him. Finally he stopped and told us we were heading for the wrong direction and that we had missed the road to Khagrachhari some two miles

back. At the mention of Khagrachhari we realized our second mistake. When Ramgar was mentioned to us as a holiday spot, we were told by one of those mischievous friends that it was in Comilla. And now we knew it was in Khagrachhari.

So we turned around and headed for the road. Fog made the going so slow that I fell asleep not bothering about the behemoths of trucks and buses suddenly appearing out of the fog. If death comes, let it come in sleep, that is my motto.

When I woke up, it was morning and our car was not moving. I looked out and saw the reason with a sinking heart. A snaking queue of trucks had disappeared into the distant fog. The under-construction road had created the bottleneck. I climbed down and tried to talk to the truckers to know the reason for the snarl-up. The sleepy truckers grumbled something unintelligible and looked another way. So I came back and went back to sleep. Next time I opened my eyes, the car had started moving. Soon we took a left turn and we were in Khagrachhari district.

The scene immediately changed. It was no longer the plain land Bangladesh. There's a small market at the entrance to the road. A few hills people in typical attire loitered around the tea stalls, eyeing us with curiosity.

The road slowly gained elevation, winding in tortuous ways through hills and forests. The breathtaking beauty made us wide-awake. The black tape of a



road slipped through tall Shal trees. The yellow earth made a tapestry of contrasts with the green and black but the foliage was not all green. Large dull brown leaves provided a pleasant break in the view.

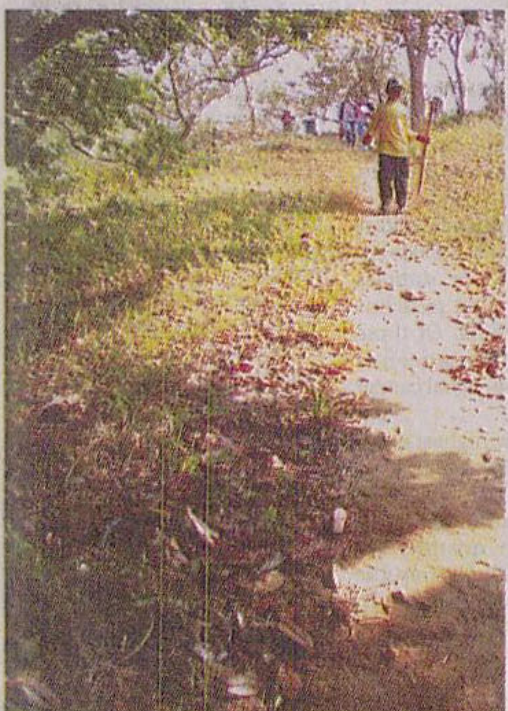
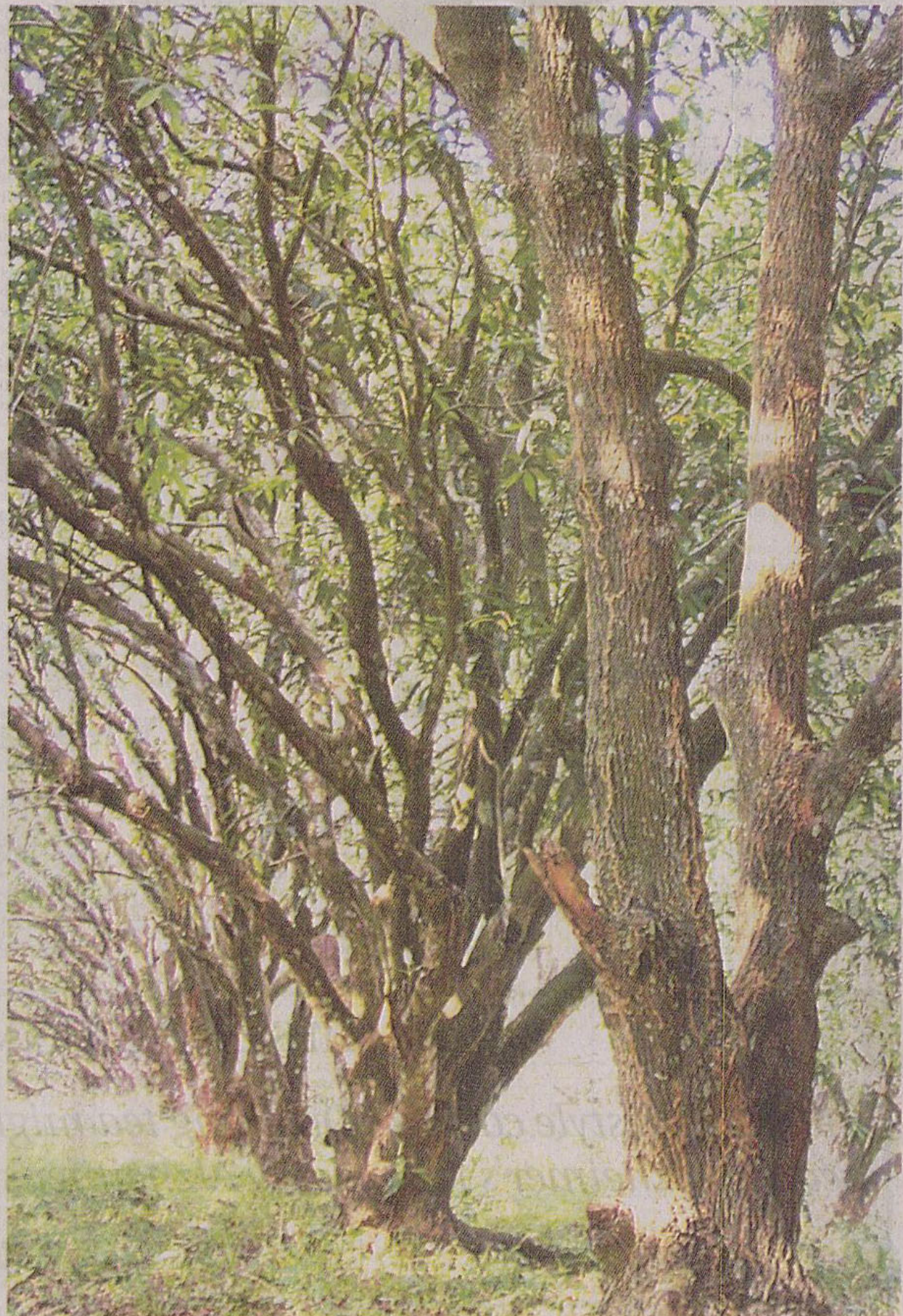
At sudden turns, bridges appeared, looking forlorn with the empty road. The railings tempted us to take a break and take in an unhurried view sitting on them. By now we were quite a distance up from the sea level. Long feather flowers drooping heavy with dew sparkled in the morning sunlight. Down below in the water, two huge bundles of bamboo collected from the forest awaited to be transported. The workers sat on the bundles probably waiting for the trucks to come.

A little later, we entered a tea garden. Not the kind of gardens we find in Sylhet. This one was much smaller in size and the plants not very healthy looking. We then went past a river. We were still not much convinced that it was a river. The width was not more than that of a canal. It lazily meandered away into the mist.

And then we were there -- Khagrachhari Horticulture Centre. On top of a small hill, it gave a beautiful view of the rolling forests. We dumped our bags in a shabby room. But who cares when the ambience promises so much.

We decided to take a look around the centre first. Numerous kinds of trees made the surrounding a delightful place to explore. We walked through the sprawling garden. You could easily lose yourself in this solitude. The wildness of the fenced-off place is unmatched. One could easily stay the whole day here just lazing around and watching birds. When we were tired we sat under the shade of the trees, eyeing the activities going on at the bottom of the hill on a strip of farmland. It was the time for Boro plantation and farmers were busy in transplanting the rice.

We felt hungry and headed for the rest house. But we knew we had much more to explore.



Story: NAM HMED  
Photo: OWFIK LAHI