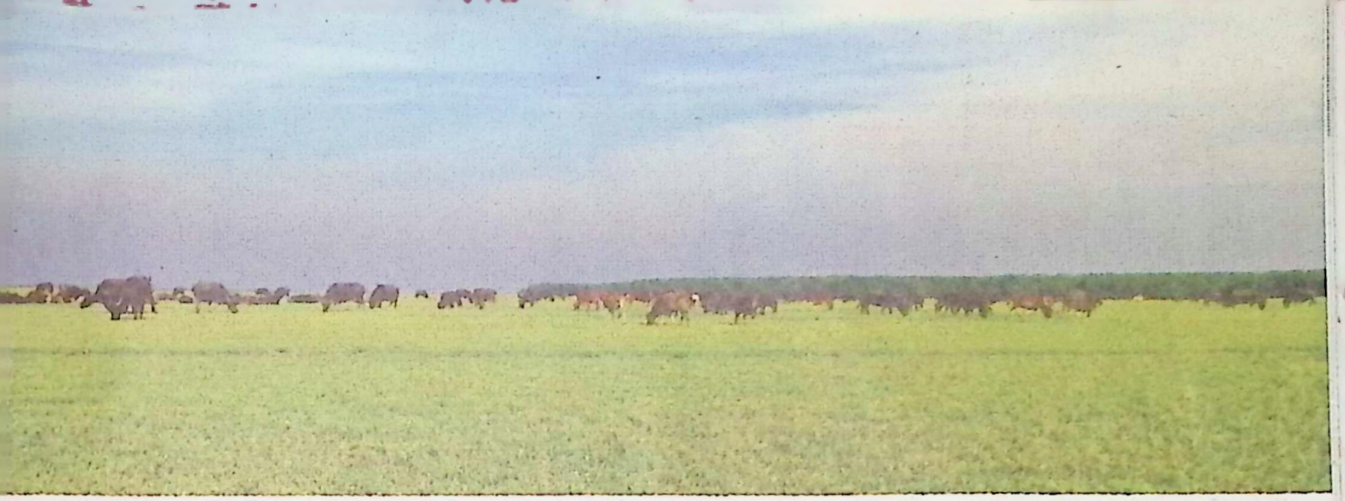


An idyllic scene: Cattle graze on the vast green grassland along the beach.



PHOTOS: RAFIQ HASAN

When asked whether the government conducted any survey on Damar Char the UP chairman said, the lands in Dail are still under the ministry of forest and surveys are mainly conducted on the lands which become cultivable. According to him, the total size of Damar Char would be around 30 kilometers long and 20 kilometers wide. The government officials are also not aware of anything such development in Damar Char.

"The area is very remote and I am yet to go there as I joined very recently," said Abul Hossen Mohammad Moyeen Uddin, the Hatia Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) over telephone. When asked he also expressed his ignorance about Sagartila. He, however, said he had heard of a small sea beach in Nijhum Dwip but not in Damar Char.

M Helal Uddin, a prominent journalist in Hatiya and the editor of the weekly *Hatia Kantha* also expressed his ignorance about a sea beach in Damar Char. "So far my knowledge goes there is no sea beach in Damar Char." He said there is a small sea beach in the area that is located in Nijhum Dwip.

The government has no plans to develop tourism facilities. M Moazzem Hossein, General Manager planning of state-owned Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) said he has no knowledge about any sea beach in Damar Char. "As the manager of planning, I must have known if there was any plan of the government." He, however, said government has some plans to develop tourism facilities in Nijhum Dwip.

Mostafizur Rahman a retired high official of (BPC) hailing from Noakhali district also said he had never heard of any sandy beach in the coast of Noakhali district. Rahman served the BPC for over 20 years.

A local leader of landless people in the area, Abdul Malek, frequently visited Damar Char for land purposes. Malek accompanied me to the spot. He also did not have any idea about having any sandy sea beach there. Malek used to call the area Sagartila.

I reached Sagartila on November 20, at around 12 noon. The water along the beach was white mixed with sand but the locals said it turns light blue in mid- winter. The beach remains up all year round and never submerges not even in high tide except if there is a big natural calamity like a tsunami or cyclone. "We never heard of sSagartila submerging except during a high surge like when there is a danger signal number 10," Malek said.

The beach is around 10-15 kilometres long stretching from the West to the East. The natural beauty of the new born beach is very similar to the sea beach in Cox's Bazar termed as the longest sea beach in the world. There are two types of sands in the beach, black and white. The black sand is called black gold for its richness in uranium. The upper side of the beach is covered with white sand and lower part is rich with black sand. The flocks of red crabs also become visible on the white sand in the upper side of the beach like Cox's bazaar.

There are many attractions in this newly borne sea beach for the visitors and nature lovers. The holiday goers can spend hour after hour watching numerous birds with various colours and characters flocking on the beach. The beach area is free from any sort of air and sound pollution. There is no road, no motor vehicles in Damar Char. You will not find even a single cycle or rickshaw here.

The vast grassland will soothe the eyes of the visitors. The nearby mangrove forest also has deer, fox and big snakes. Wildlife is seldom visible as animals hardly come out of the forest during the day time. But some signs of their coming out in the night are visible in the nearby fields. ■