

LS SUGGETS

# STAR GAZING

**T**HERE is a place in Bangladesh where you can gaze upon the heavens with the naked eye. The Garo call it "Askipara." Which roughly translated means "place of stars." Located in Mymensingh, it should definitely be on top of every Bangladeshis bucket list.

I've been there twice and believe it or not you can see the satellites in space. You can easily spend hours just looking at the stars. It's just you and the beautiful scent of the earth. You feel miniscule compared to the colossal universe before you. Nothing can touch you and for a quiet moment you can achieve nirvana. If you know your constellations well enough you can even trace them out. Now of course it's not possible for everyone to go there. But fear not, with the right equipment you can gaze at the heavens from the comfort of your own home.

First of all there are several factors you must look into before organising a stargazing party. The best time to do it is in winter. Spring is on its way so I suggest you start preparing if you want to have the best experience possible. The city lights make stargazing a very difficult task. So timing is also important. After 11pm is a good time, the city is somewhat peaceful. Most of the time. Preferably on a clear night because surprise, a cloudy sky severely hinders your ability to stargaze.

If money is not a problem then you can buy telescopes from New Market, Science

Laboratory or various electronics shops across the city. You can also buy telescopes at affordable prices from China or Singapore. Be sure to talk to the shopkeeper about the ways to best utilise your telescope. Reading up online is highly recommended for the amateur stargazer. There are also several types of telescopes. Do your research before going to buy one. Pick the one you think would be best suited to you. It should fit you like a glove.

If you're on a tight budget then you can buy binoculars for around Tk 13,000-15,000. It has the same functions as a telescope and it's cheap. It does not require any set up. And they don't give an inverted view like most telescopes. It's also mobile so you can use them for practically anything. I recommend binoculars for first time stargazers. It is an excellent stepping stone to the world of astronomy. If after using your binoculars for a while, you decide that this is a hobby you truly want to pursue then go for a telescope.

Now if you don't want to spend any money that's okay too. The Bangladesh Astronomical Association organises a stargazing session for free every Friday from 4pm to 8pm, provided there are no hartals and the weather is good. The session provides the public with both telescopes and binoculars. Visit their website or Facebook page to get more information. You can even become a member by paying an annual fee of Tk 2,000. The science museum also organises a similar session on Saturdays and Sundays from sunset. The fee is a mere Tk10.

Before you set it up you should brush up on your astronomy knowledge. Md Abdul Jabbar's "Tara-Porichiti" is an excellent



read. You can also Google it. Having an adequate knowledge will help you immensely in identifying constellations and nebulae. You don't want to miss out on this.

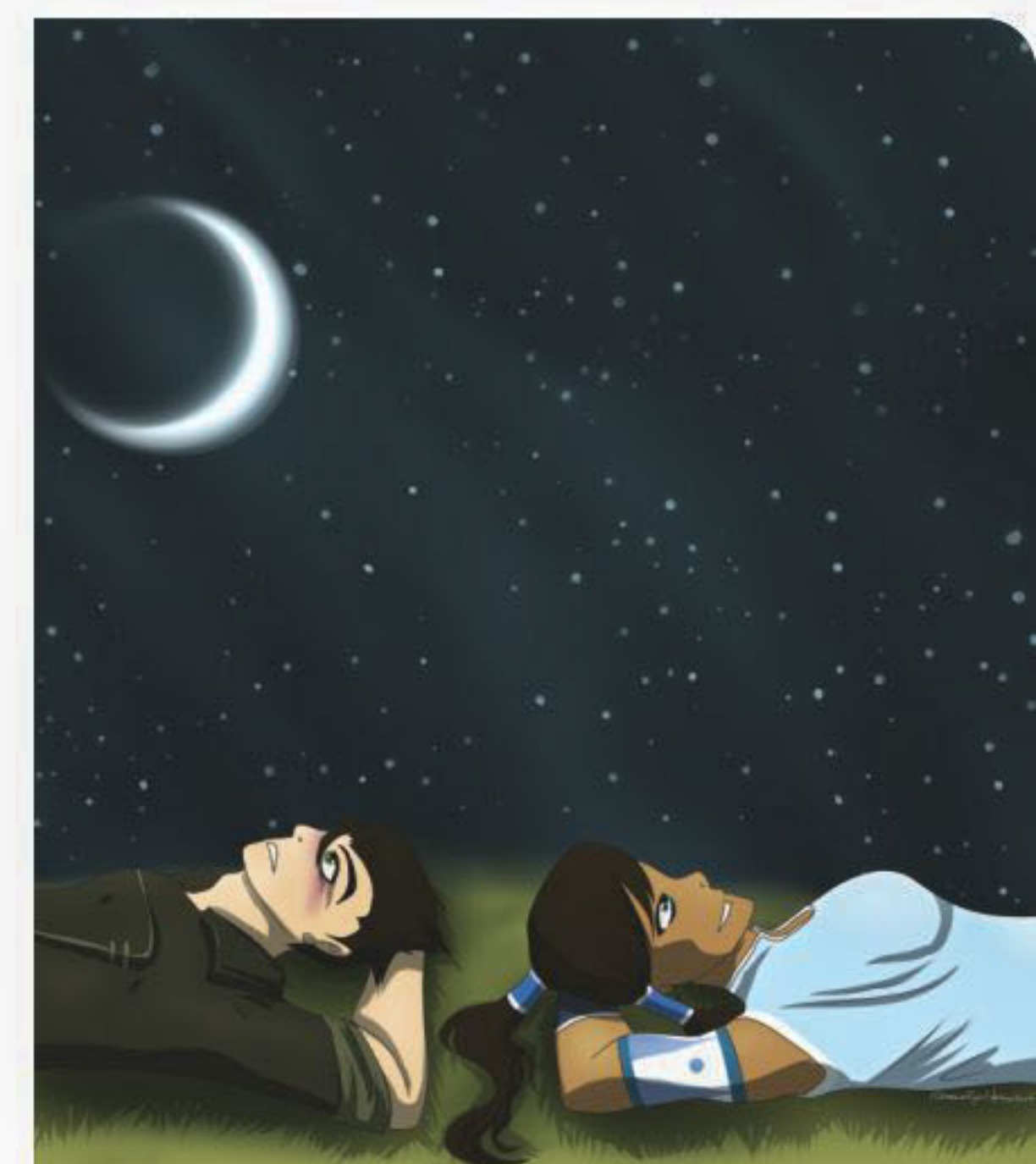
At the moment Jupiter is available for us to see. It rises in the east at mid evening around 6pm. You can even see its moons with the help of telescopes and binoculars. Venus, also known as the "evening star", is always available to be seen. Unlike stars which can be viewed at any time, planets are only visible for a short while at a particular time. It is vital to know their timings so you can catch them. Alongside planets you can view the fascinating Orion nebula and Horsehead nebula. If you're lucky you can catch a meteor shower.

Once you've got all the right stuff it's time to throw a party. We're not gonna help with that, hopefully you know how to party.

**By Daneesha Khan**

**Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

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## Gaze upon the galaxy

When was the last time you looked up?

Us prisoners of the urban jungle hardly get the opportunity to appreciate the wonders of the galaxy, due to all the light and air pollution. The last week of January or the beginning of February is the perfect time to stargaze, as there are no ominous rain clouds crowding the sky, nor are there layers of fog that beckon the winter chills.

Why not make stargazing a major event? This window of opportunity comes only once a year, so make sure you take the initiative in the coming few days!

Take yourself out of Dhaka to an uninhibited sky with some good company and delicious snacks, and spend a night admiring the faraway wonders. Research on the lunar cycle and find out what stage the moon is in, and what constellations and planets are visible during that lunar position. Download stargazing apps like SkyView or computer software like Stellarium or buy an astronomy book to help you identify major constellations and planets.

You don't necessarily need a fancy telescope. If the weather is right, a world of endless possibilities will become visible to your naked eye. You don't need to be an astronomy guru to appreciate this natural wonder. There's something quite magical about a starry night. A night of stargazing is not just about the stars. Rather, when looking up into infinity and beyond, it seems that one finds the answers to a lot of life's important questions.

**By Mehreen Aziz**