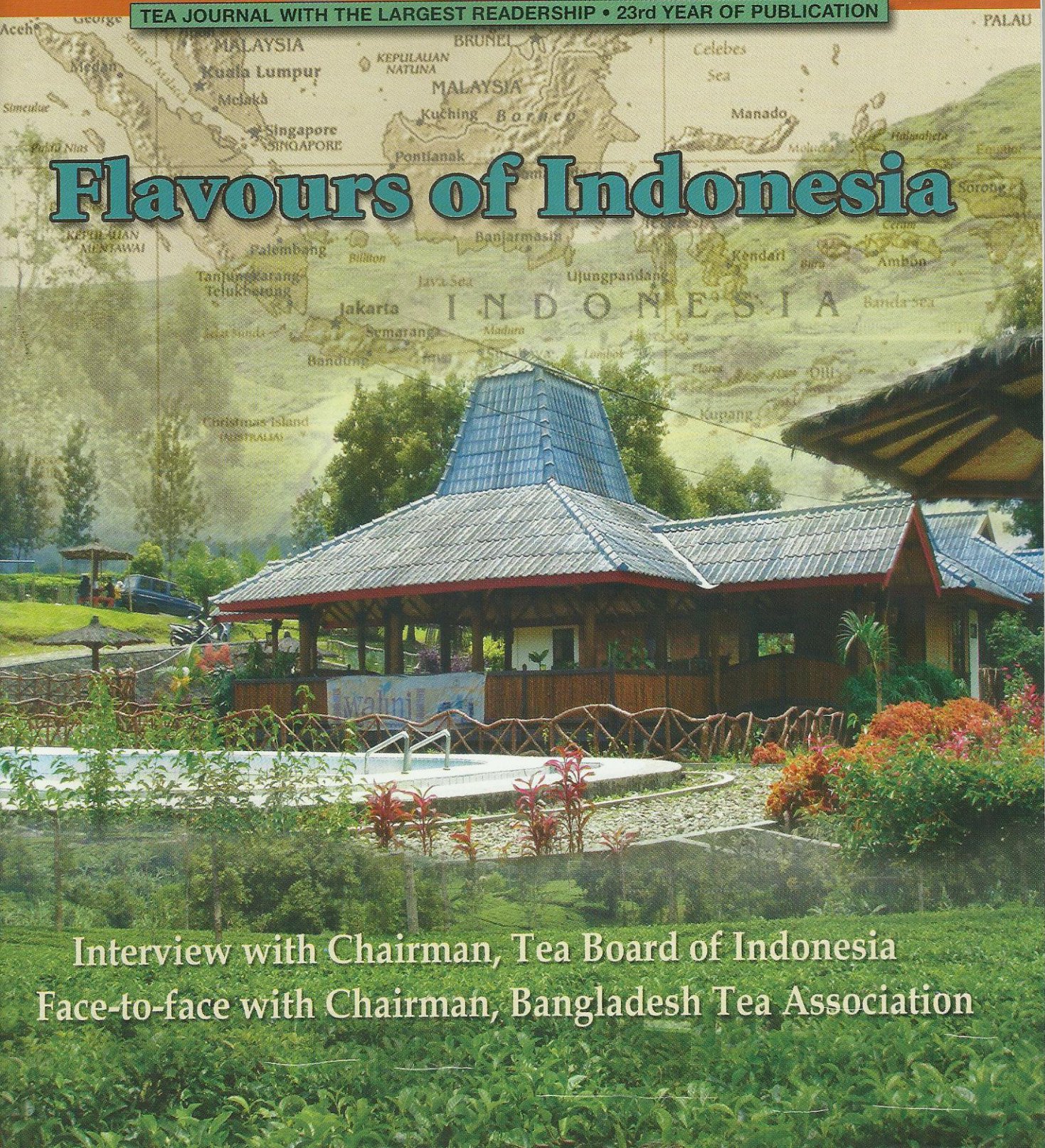


# TEA TIME

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## Flavours of Indonesia



Interview with Chairman, Tea Board of Indonesia  
Face-to-face with Chairman, Bangladesh Tea Association



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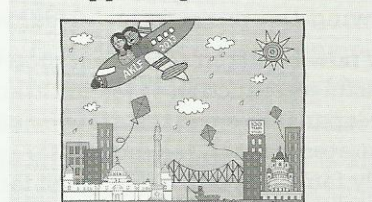
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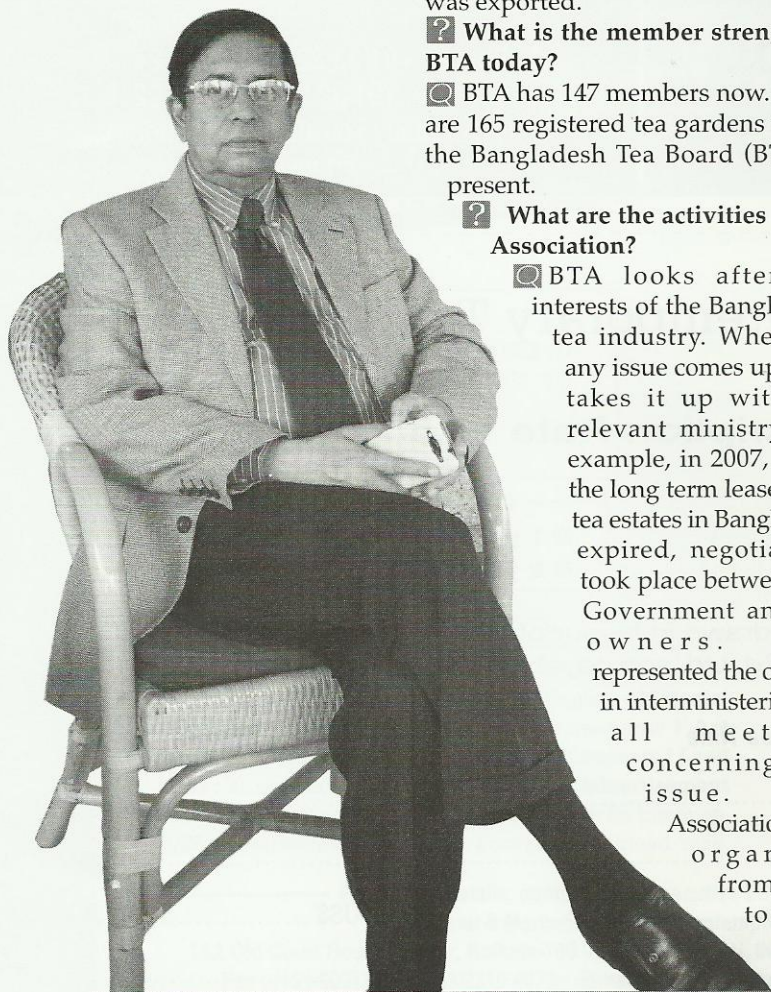
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Moustachioed Mukesh



# face to face

**With MOHAMMAD SAFWAN CHOUDHURY, Chairman, Bangladesh Tea Association, who tells *Contemporary Tea Time* that small growers will have a big role in the Bangladesh tea industry in the near future**



**Q** When was the Bangladesh Tea Association formed?

**A** The Association (BTA) was formed in 1952. Sylhet was a district under Assam in undivided Bengal and tea was being cultivated in the area called Surma Valley. The tea produced used to be sold through Calcutta. After partition, the Chittagong Auction came into being in 1948. In 1952, Pakistan Tea Association (PTA) was formed. Mainly British companies and later some proprietary companies were members of PTA. The headquarters of PTA was in Chittagong because the tea growing area was in East Pakistan. Eighty percent of the tea produced was consumed in Pakistan and the rest was exported.

**Q** What is the member strength of BTA today?

**A** BTA has 147 members now. There are 165 registered tea gardens under the Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB) at present.

**Q** What are the activities of the Association?

**A** BTA looks after the interests of the Bangladesh tea industry. Whenever any issue comes up, BTA takes it up with the relevant ministry. For example, in 2007, when the long term lease of all tea estates in Bangladesh expired, negotiations took place between the Government and the owners. BTA represented the owners in interministerial and all meetings concerning the issue. The Association also organises from time to time,

meetings on infrastructure development for the tea industry, like roads, gas supply, electricity etc. and also on issues like subsidised ration for tea labourers, annual requirement of fertiliser for the industry etc. Tea workers receive subsidised ration from the Government. The 1500 tonnes of wheat given for the purpose by the Government is handled and distributed by BTA. BTA also prepares the estate-wise annual requirement of fertilisers and takes it up with the relevant Ministries — the Ministry of Agriculture and Chemical Corporation and the Ministry of Industries.

**Q** Does the Association play any role in the labour welfare and social concerns of the tea industry in the country?

**A** We have a bipartite agreement with the labour union that is negotiated after every two years. Labour welfare takes place as per the existing labour law that was last upgraded in 2006, after being taken up by BTA Labour Welfare Sub-Committee.

In the case of subsidised ration, the Government gives the first subsidy so that the Producer gets foodgrain worth 24 Taka at 18 Taka and the latter gives the second subsidy so that the labourers get the same foodgrain at 1 Taka 30 Paisa. BTA negotiates on the quantity of ration that the labourers are given and has now requested the Government to allot 2000 tonnes for the purpose.

Besides the above, the labour force gets maternity benefits, medical facilities, leave, provident fund, housing, etc. that are from time to time enhanced through negotiations by BTA. Recently the Government has taken the decision to take over the primary and secondary education that exist in the tea gardens.

A healthy thing is that we have only one Union of the workers in the tea industry. The Union is powerful and mature. Negotiations are easier,



# TACHAI CO-OPERATIVE a success story

“We need to do a lot more to upgrade our garden and produce,” Dibyendu Chaudhuri, Assistant Manager, Tachai Tea Estate in Tripura, tells Dr. Anjali Pathak

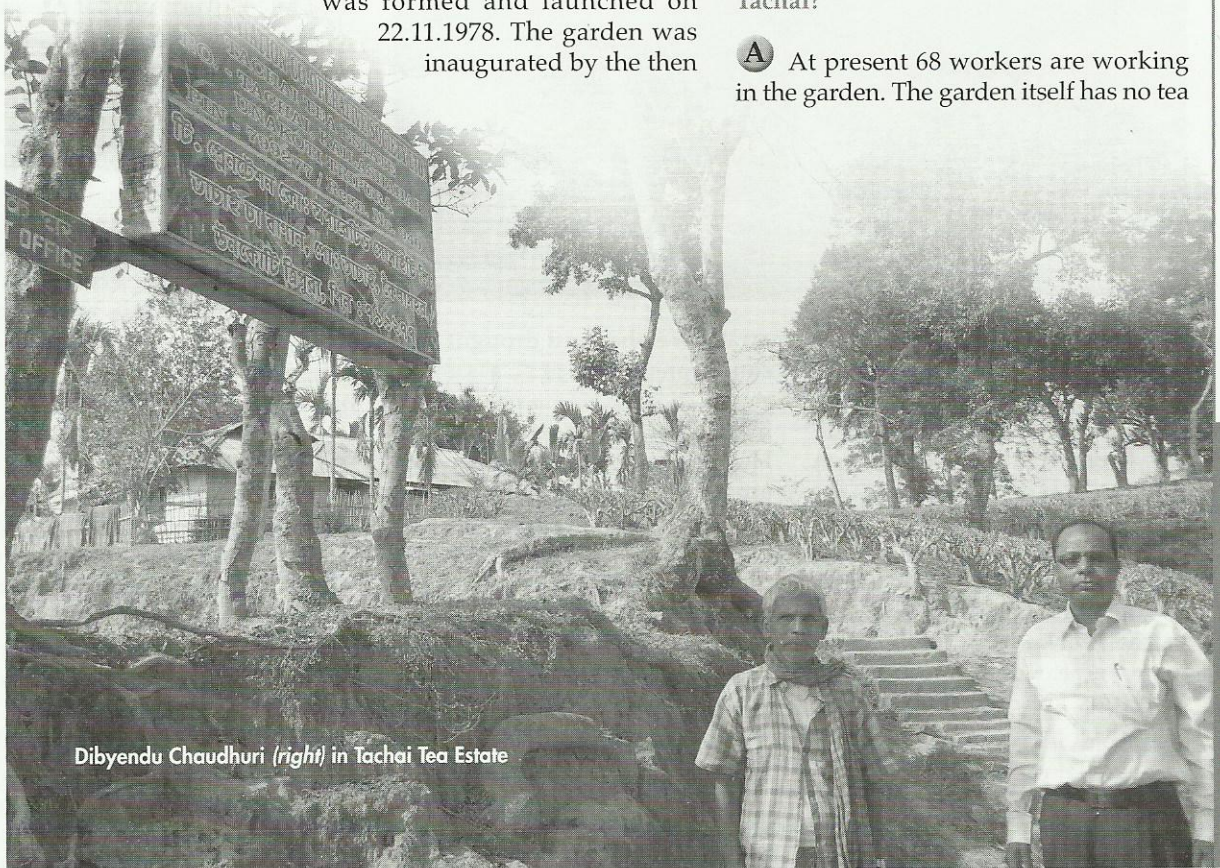
**Q** Tell us about the formation of the Tachai estate cooperative society in a nutshell. How big is Tachai garden and since when has it been functioning as a cooperative?

**A** The workers working in private tea gardens are always under the threat of retrenchment from work at any moment, without any valid reason. With a view to protecting the workers from such whimsical decisions, the Tea Plantation Co-op. Society Ltd. at Tachai Tea Estate was formed and launched on 22.11.1978. The garden was inaugurated by the then

Chief minister, late Nripendra Chakroborty, through planting tea bushes at the inaugural ceremony. Shakti Prasana Bhattacharjee was the founder of this tea estate. The gross area of Tachai garden is 113 hectares of which approximately 48 hectares is under plantation.

**Q** How many workers are living on Tachai tea estate? Of these how many are working in the garden and how many in the tea factory? What about worker discipline and absenteeism at Tachai?

**A** At present 68 workers are working in the garden. The garden itself has no tea



Dibyendu Chaudhuri (right) in Tachai Tea Estate



# Mangrove tea

**MRITTIKA BOSE** discovered a  
24-hour tea lounge on a launch  
to Sundarban in Bangladesh

**T**he small motorboat sliced through layers of fog as we sat shivering against the chilly wind, wrapped in voluminous jackets. Visibility was down to the minimum and suddenly we came upon a mid-sized launch and were asked to board it. This was M.V. Chhuti, the Guide Tours vessel that would be our mode of transport and residence for the next three days in Sunderbans, Bangladesh.

We were welcomed on board by Reza, our young guide for the trip and the smiling staff of Chhuti led us to the lounge — a circular glass panelled room just behind the bow — where tea, coffee and biscuits were ready to be poured out. The piping hot tea warmed us inside out as we looked around at our co-passengers — an interesting group of tourists of different ages from different corners of the world. Almost an hour later, when the sun managed to penetrate the misty envelope, our launch began its journey from Khulna along Rupsa river.

A sumptuous breakfast was soon laid out with more tea and coffee and we started getting acquainted with each other and soon became one big (twenty of us plus our guide Reza) gang. We passed a number of ports and were soon cruising along Passur river, a major distributory emerging from Rupsa. After passing Mongla, which has a big port, we cruised along Sela canal. Small hamlets were coming out of slumber. Fishermen were out in their country boats for the first catch of the day. A school of Irrawady dolphins

