

DHAKA SUNDAY APRIL 8, 2007



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THAILAND



KAPTAI - 3

Hornbill's way

A top view of Kaptai Mukh Khal



Red mark shows location of Kaptai Mukh Khal

THE Kaptai Khal lay before me -- wide and winding, mysterious and forbidding -- shriveled in the winter. The shores on the banks were now wider than the flow itself. Huge stones carried down by the mighty monsoon streams shone in the sun like some sunbathing giant turtles. Huge bamboo rafts were stationed in front of the forest bungalow -- the bamboo traders had called a halt here. Away, thick forests stood silently. From high up here, it looks so mysterious.

I found a bench by the Khal and stretched myself on it to rest my back. A cool breeze stirred up the Krishnachura branches high above me. A few brown leaves glanced down on me, I could feel their smell -- rich and dew-laden. A white cloud had streaked the sky. Then appeared a pair of langurs -- long-tailed and black-faced. High up in the trees, they

hopped from one branch to another, then settled down and kept looking at me. They tore leaves and stuffed them in their mouth. I was watching the pair before I fell asleep.

When I woke up, I did not know for a moment where I was. And then I saw the young man -- a Chakma -- standing beside me, looking at me with a solemn face. Khosru and others were gone.

"Hi," I said. "Did you see my fellow travelers?"

The man nodded his head and pointed his fingers to a hill. I eyed the hills -- quiet a distance. With care I descended the slope to the rocky bottom of the Khal. The round, tennis ball sized pebbles slipped under my feet, making the going difficult. After some time, I gave up the idea of walking on the shore and instead tromped into the stream.

The chilly water sent a shiver up my bone, I was now thigh deep in the stream. I stood there for some time and enjoyed the touch of the cool water. I can see right to the bottom, crystal clear. The streaming water made contours round the pebbles. Zillions of tadpoles swum close to the bottom. I bent down and picked some of them up, had a good look at their strange form and then released them back to the water. Swarms of small bright orange fish were gathering around me, darting in every way with lightning speed as I tried to catch them. A big crab was ogling at me.

Slowly I waded forward. The uneven ground would suddenly fall to chest-deep and again rise to knee level. It still was difficult to walk, but the feel of it was good. I turned the bend and stood still. A breathtaking scene was unfolding before my eyes. The forests on

both banks had closed on the stream, the trees had bent down on the water. The green reflected like the placid eye of a reptile. From where I was standing, it looked so mysterious and vast with the trees towering high. I had a feeling that I was in a gully. There is not a single soul anywhere. The red of the Jaruls, the yellow of the Mehognis and the green of the Shals had all mingled together to create a new canvas of abstract art. The pale sky in the distance only added a pensive look to the scene.

I was down about four kilometers into the Khal. And then I stopped at the next bend as I heard high-pitch laughter of a girl. There were other voices too. I slowly turned the bend and stopped. Three Marma girls clad in red blouses and printed lungi were fishing in the stream. They dipped a net attached to bamboo

poles into water and lifted it. Small tadpoles wriggled on the net and they quickly collected them into bamboo baskets. Sometimes, they would probe into the water and come up with snails.

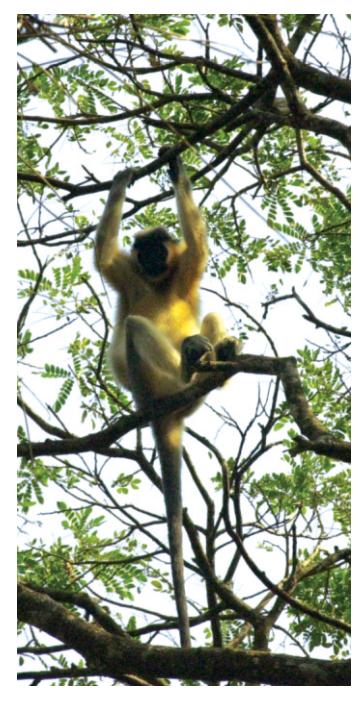
As I clicked my camera, they suddenly glanced at me, looking surprised. A quick burst of words between them, and then they bolted into the forest, with the agility of mountain goats they jumped onto the shore and climbed up the steep side. Then they were gone. I stood there stupefied and repenting. I should not have startled them like this. To them, I must have looked like an alien.

I cut across the stream and walked into the hills again. Khosru must be here somewhere. And round some tall trees was he. Binoculars fixed to his eyes, he was intently looking at something and signaled me to keep quiet.

"What is it?" I whispered. Khosru passed me the binocular and pointed to a high tree. It took me a few seconds to focus and then the birds came into view. A magnificent pair of Indian pied hornbills. Their black bodies streaked with white. Their large yellow bills burning bright in the sun. They are cawing in a loud clear voice. Finally, we had found them! We felt a kind of calmness we never had felt before. As if we had just come out of a bout of fever.

Then the hornbills noticed our presence. With their big round eyes, they looked at us, as if scolding us for breaking their peace, and sprang into air. In less than three seconds, they were gone, leaving us in a daze.

Story: INAM AHMED
Photo: INAM, KHASRU, TOWFIK, MINTU
Courtesy: Forest Department



Capped langur

BIRD WATCHING WITH DR REZA



Eurasian Spoonbill

Platalea leucorodia

ONLY heron-like large white bird in our area that has a very long spatula or flat spoon-shaped black bill tipped yellow and longish crest. Legs black and there develops a golden-yellow breast-band during the breeding season. Becoming rarer restricted to larger wetlands and the Sundarbans. Actual size ± 90 cm with ± 25 cm long bill.



The Hornbill caught in our lense



The Marma girls catching tadpoles



The lonely Kaptai Khal