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INDIA NEPAL BHUTAN

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Teknaf

A bird's eye view



It was early morning when our car wheeled into the courtyard of the forest bungalow. Waking up from a half-sleep, we stepped down to a perfect still photography of nature. A tranquil Naf river lapped gently, its surface blue and shiny almost like the surface of a mirror. Only gentle ripples broke the morning stillness. A line of mangrove trees frilled the river on both shores. It was high tide and the tree trunks were half submerged in water. The leaves, fresh from an overnight rain, A boat was tied to a tree, it floated still.

Across the blue ribbon of the river stood tall the Arakan hills, unbroken and misty. They looked upside down in reflections on water. A deep blue sky streaked with white clouds. We sat on the balcony of the bungalow, sipped tea and took in the view. Slowly floated in a few fishing boats, the oars fell and rose, the boat proceeded with painstaking slowness.

It is such postcard beauty of the nature that tourists come to Teknaf. Here you get the mountains and the river, the forests and the beach, the sun and the water. There is much to explore in Teknaf and we had come here for that. But we could have sat

here for ages, it seemed, and enjoy this morning scenery.

But after a while, we had another thought. A long range of hills had run for miles right from the back of the bungalow. These are the hills you see from the Teknaf road and they could be a nice place to trek the morning away. The kitchen was actually right at the base of the first hill.

We started climbing up the steep slope. There were some thin trails winding up through trees and thick bushes. We followed one of them. There was something funny about the hills. Once they must have been covered with thick forest of tall trees. But today, very few of the trees were left -- the rest fell victims to illegal loggers and corrupt forest officials (When we visited Teknaf, the chief conservator of forest was not arrested with his booty). Only a few of the mighty trees were still left, as if as reminders to what the place was, their trunks very wide and crooked with age. The rustle of the Chan (a kind of long grass) sang in our ears. In some places they were so tall to hide us completely. Birds twittered merrily -- known and unknown sounds, sounds that you hear on any hills in Bangladesh.

We turned a bend through

the thick undergrowth and found the droppings. Huge blobs of excreta full of fibers like grass and straw like things. We walked a little further along the

ers saying that a herd of 15 elephants roam these hills. The droppings are not very old, only last night's work. A few things puzzled us -- how could these

because of the onslaught of the human population. These poor animals must have been suffering a lot.

We were now crossing the



narrow trail and found more of them. The animals that produced them are nothing other than elephants. Then we remembered one of the forest-

huge animals walk through the narrow trail without falling off and what they had for food? Apparently there are not enough food here on the hills

first hill into the next, a much higher one than the previous. First we climbed down to a valley and then trekked up the side of the hill. On the way we

found more droppings and we were now walking with caution. The tuskers might not be very far away and we better be careful before chancing upon the hungry animals.

Half an hour later we were on top of the hill running unbroken for quite some distance. We stood there, looked down. The scene around simply took our breath away. It seemed we are on an aero plane, flying low over Teknaf. We could see the Naf river turning in the distance on our right and then meeting the sea. Where the river had widened to meet the sea, we could see long rows of fishing boats looking like some stick insects. The sea beach could be seen with the line of pines. The salt beds looked like the squares of a gigantic chessboard. The Myanmar landscape was just opposite us. We inspected it with our binoculars. We could see a vast empty land of green grass running deep into Myanmar. There was no human habitation in sight. The fields had ended with more hills and forests.

This sight we could never found anywhere in Teknaf unless we had taken this trekking trip. We walking along the ridge of the hill, keeping the Naf

on our right. A white thin line kept constantly changing on the river -- the current had created a kind of foaming effect on the river. Right below us the river lapped gently and among the mangrove trees are moored two brightly coloured launches. A long pier had run into the river.

We kept walking along ridge. From here, everything looked so unreal and we felt we are some kind of eagles hovering over Teknaf in search of its beauty. And just then we had a chance to catch a flash in the sky. A serpent eagle darting out of the sky into the thickets of the hill. A few seconds later, it rose again, a long snake dangling from its beaks. A majestic bird with its wings spread across. We took in the view as long as we can. And then we started descending.

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Photo: Inam Ahmed & Syed Zakir Hossain

BIRD WATCHING WITH DR REZA KHAN

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

POSSIBLY the smallest gull that we see around our coastal areas and harbours. It is confusable with nearly similar-sized Brown-headed Gull that is more common in the country than this one. Non-breeding specimens that we see in the country are whitish with yellow legs and reddish or blackish red bill, and little black at tips of the primary feathers. Brown-headed Gull has much darker tips of primary feathers with two or more white spots. Just a small blackish blotch on the ear-covert on otherwise white head. Breeding males have dark brown head as in this picture.

