



DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 5, 2007

HOLIDAY

PACKAGE TOURS
GALAXY Holidays
quality at home & abroad
Taj Caselina, 2nd Floor, 25 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka 1212
Tel: 9888055, 9885871 Fax: (880-2) 8815551
E-mail: holidays@galaxybd.com

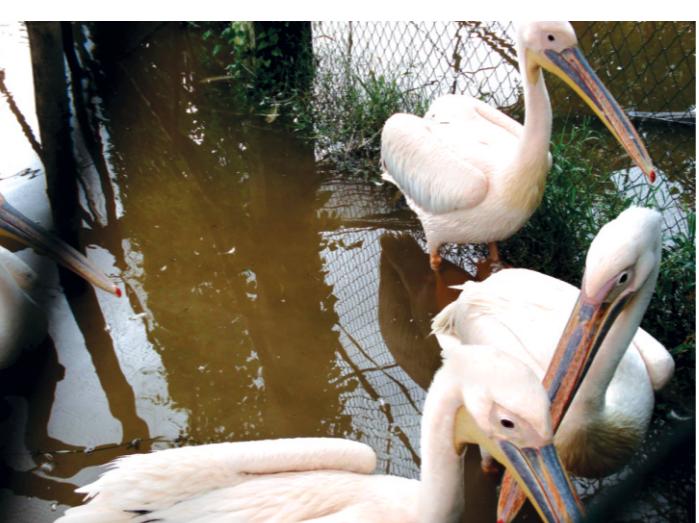
BANGLADESH



Pied hornbill



Lesser adjutant stork



White pelican



Golden pheasant

Syed Zakir Hossain

DULAHAJRA SAFARI PARK

Into a different wilderness

OUR car headlight showed a drizzly shower to the rhythm of the wiper as we entered inside the safari park. Even in the dark, we could make out the strange shapes dinosaurs, and Bengal tigers and deer, all made of concrete and in suspended animation. For the first time, we started thinking we had come to a wrong place this time. Whoever has heard of ugly statues of animals in a safari park? The bungalows dampened our spirit even further. A strong musty hung around the rooms. And yes, the electricity went out the exact moment we stepped inside the spacious dining room. As we lay in bed after a quick dinner, huge moths and grasshoppers and all the unknown insects came buzzing around the lantern. To sink our mood even more, it started raining hard. We knew this is the perfect recipe for a spoiled holiday.

It was still raining when we got up and did not know whether it was morning or evening. To our utter dismay we discovered that none of us had brought any raincoat. Just our luck! But we decided we would not give up. What if we can't go around Dulahajra safari park, we could still go to Cox's Bazar sea beach. It's only 43 kilometers from here and none of us had ever seen the sea in high monsoon. The beach could be our appetizer.

It was only the beginning of the floods. The villages by the road had started getting under water flowing down in full force from the hills. Instead of panic, we found a kind of festivity among the villagers. Everybody had a net or a fishing rod and happily yapping in the water. This is what you call coping with floods making most of your enemy. When we reached Cox's Bazar, we were in a daze at the fuming state of the sea. We had been used to a tranquil winter sea. But this one looked deep brown and the waves very high and breaking with a wild ferocity. The slate cloud hanging low in the horizon had cast a black



ominous shadow over the choppy water. There was no beach as we are used to know. It was all water. We sat on the balcony of the wooden restaurant Angel's Drop and enjoyed the sight. Then we got down and jogged along the slim beach that was still there and finally had a dip in the sea. We did not care if there was too much

sand and mud churning out of the bottom of the sea. The trawlers had vanished from the horizon because of the bad weather. It was only we, a few seagulls, the lonely beach and the constant driving drizzle.

We were back at the bungalow before lunch. And soon the rain



stopped, and even there was a glow of the sun. We immediately decided to go inside the park, because this might be our last chance. We crossed the high gate to the park and then we froze. Right in front of us stood a black monster at least the bull gayal looked like one. At about six feet tall and its long thick horns

pointed at us and a wild look in its eyes, we thought death was only feet away. I had never seen a gayal, a black cow like animal once found in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and now almost extinct, from such a close distance. We could hear its breath, its nostrils looked huge.

"Don't worry," the forest

ranger's voice broke our hypnotic spell. "It is no more wild. It has become more domesticated than any domestic cattle."

As if to lend credibility to the forester's words, the gayal swayed its tails. Still we did not take any chance. Quickly we took snaps of this rare animal and proceeded down the metalled road that had snaked into deep forest. We saw three or four more gayals, both bulls and cows but much smaller in size, grazing in the distance. And then we met the first of the cages. I have never liked caged animals they look so helpless and out of place. And yet I could not help taking pictures of these animals and birds, some of them already endangered. There was the Assamese Macaque and the pigtailed macaque. There was this lone pigtailed macaque that started at us with a ferocious look.

"Be careful, it attacks people. Only last week it tore the tendon of a visitor," the forester warned and we stepped back from the net.

There was this beautiful clouded leopard, a rain forest animal that faces serious extinction threat. The pair of woolly stork was brooding after the rain, and the painted storks were putting on a brilliant display of their pink feathers. And wow, the rare vultures, the pied hornbills and the pelicans.

After the cages, it was a long stretch of undulating road. The long trees had formed thick walls on the sides. We were as if going through a wide tunnel. It started raining again and the rain drops started slipping off the leaves and branches, softly pattering around. The road turned and we stopped. A breathtaking scene was waiting for us. A huge lake, wild grasses growing on its shores, and a deep forest on the other side of it. In the afternoon gloom, the lake shone silvery in the soft drizzle. We stood there and took in the sudden beauty before we proceeded any further.

Story & Photo: INAM AHMED



Wild cattle - Goyal

Syed Zakir Hossain
White ibis & woolly stork