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Star WOLIDAY



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DULAHAJRA SAFRI PARK
PART 2

Into a different wilderness

The wooden walkway

THE rain-soaked road glistened in the diffused afternoon light as it snaked through the forest, like the wet hair of a woman lying on the grass. We followed it to reach the other side of the lake only parted by the road. The water level here is however maintained at a much lower level with the help of a water regulator. And a long wooden bridge, at least 20 feet above the water had run over the lake almost in a loop. It made little sense to us what purpose this pier like bridge served.

The forester opened a gate and stepped on the lake bridge.

"Hey-o-hey. Ah-ah-ah," the man started making a loud noise to our surprise. "hey-o-o-o."

And then we saw this strange movement in the water. Our heart leaped to our mouth as we recognised what those tiny black things wreathing in the water were -- crocs. The countless sweet water crocodiles were approaching



Ghoral, A rediscovered goat antelope

us, their heads just above water and their beady eyes glistening. They were now right below us and we could make out their log like bodies propelled by the gentle sidewise movement of their tails. They tried to leap above water, their mouth wide open. Crocs have no tongue, only a whitish hollow, we were confirmed now. A slip on the plank and we would become the food of the packing creatures.

Unable to get us, the crocs slid over the lakeshore. Huge male crocs and smaller female ones. We noticed some holes on the steep side of the lake on the other side. Croc dens. We could see the creatures deeply

combat and followed the trail. As we passed a wire fencing, a large sambar deer approached us from the other side and looked with curious eyes. We touched its moist muzzle. The animal licked us with a strange kindness.

"We have wild sambars here," the forester said. "Sometimes they visit the enclosure."

"This are Falu's deer," he pointed to another enclosure where some spotted deer were grazing. "Over there you can find Saka's deer, Harris Chwodhury's peacock and Tuku's mynah"

Then we remembered all the

soles, we could see all the telltale signs of the rainforest here -- the strange large plants in the undergrowth, the bright flowers, the large insects. The rain was now coming down like snowfall and the vision got misty. In the mist, we suddenly stopped to a movement -- a sambar deer, one of those wild ones, slowly emerged from behind the thick trunk of a tree and stopped. It looked our way and then disappeared into the bush again.

We emerged from the forest to reach another rain-swept carpeted road. The path is more curvy here and the trees denser. A 150-foot concrete tower

woman. I stood enchanted by the scene.

We found a pair of rare hog deer grazing in dense bush. The beautiful goat like animals hardly noticed our presence and kept on chewing grass.

We started again and crossed the lion and tiger enclosures. In fact, we stopped for a while and took a very very close look at the big cats. They were only five inches from our faces and they almost killed us by letting out thundering roars. Our hearts literally stopped beating and a few of us scampered away in all directions yelling at the stop of their voice.

But then the most prized animals of the day were a pair of the gorals -- a wild goat antelope believed to be extinct until now. We ogled at these strange animals, bigger than any domestic goat and looking distantly like donkeys. An army major found these animals with an indigenous family in the hill tracts and brought them here. Now the park authorities are trying to breed them. We hoped these beautiful animals would increase in number and come out of the endangered status.

It was already getting dark and we wanted to get back. It was a lonely road; with the ambiance of a heavily water-laden sky and darkening tall trees it all looked like a scene from the Bergman movies. The only sound around was the gentle swish of the tyre and the humming of the engine. After all the excitement of the day, we felt a little tired. And then just as we turned the corner, we spotted a red jungle fowl. With all its brilliance and sinew, the wild fowl had just stepped onto the road and was baffled by the approaching car. It started running just ahead of the car and then started flying, first at low flight and then rose high above the trees and disappeared. And before this sudden burst of activity could sink inside us, our eyes caught the small bird -- long beaked and blackish -- at the edge of the road. A wild quail! The bird looked at us and shot across the road with lightening speed into the thick bush. We slowly released our breath, this is the first time we were seeing a wild quail. What a luck!

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That night we again lay in bed in the musty bungalow room. The electricity was conspicuously absent and the candles burnt with the occasional crackle of insects falling in the fire. We talked about the quail and the red jungle fowl and the gorals as continuous rain beating on the trees create a magical. The drops are coming down in torrents now. We could hear thousands of frogs all happy and yapping. It all suddenly

reminded me of Tim O'Brien's "Going after Cacciato" -- the Vietnam theatre and the GIs lying in cots cussing the rain in the rainforest. We are also grumbling because we desperately need a brighter day tomorrow for our Ali Kadam adventure.

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Towering Garjan trees

INAM AHMED



INAM AHMED



Fresh water flow for the Crocs INAM AHMED

embedded inside the holes, only their protruding snouts are visible.

We were startled by a terrible slamming and whishing noise coming from below. Two large males are fighting and trying to snap each other with their open jaws. Their tails sheared the grass. But the fight did not last long as the weaker one gave up and splashed into the water.

We left the animals to their

wildlife seized from the corrupt suspect ministers' residences are kept here at this safari park.

Then we entered the forest, leaving the road. It began raining again. The drops first hit the leaves in splatters and then softly landed on the ground in sprays. Dulahajra is a rainforest and it is best to explore a forest in the midst of the rains. As we walked, the layers of fallen leaves softly crushed under our

looked impending in front of us -- an observation tower. We huffed and puffed as we laboured our way up. But once there, we knew it was worth taking the trouble. As far as the eyes stretched, the dense rain forest cascaded away. In the distance were the blue hills of Lama. On our back glistened the Bay of Bengal and the Moheshkhali island sat like a Teep on the forehead of a



Asian Black bear



A curious Barking Deer doe



A Crocs den