

Star **W** **LIDAY**

DHAKA TUESDAY JUNE 3, 2008

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

THAILAND




MUNTASIR MAMUN

COASTAL TREAT

Trekking in Teknaf

WE were coasting on the marine drive on way to Teknaf. It is one of the finest trips in Bangladesh, we decided. On one side you have the hills and on the other the sea. At one place we found a line of coconut trees. The view was simply breathtaking. The long beach lay lonely. I wondered why no one had put up a tourist lodge here. It could be the best place to get lost from the Cox's Bazar crowd.

Once in Teknaf, we had a quick visit to the beach. This place is always neglected and tourists who come this way stay here for a night to ferry over to Saint Martin's Island.



Compared to Cox's Bazar, Teknaf beach looked stark naked -- only three or four beach chairs baked in the sun and not a single tourist in sight. A few hungry dogs trotted around. A kid begged us to buy his watermelons. We ripped open the red flesh inside and the dogs gathered around us. They were so starved that they wolfed down the melons together with the sand.

But the beach was not our main target here. We waited until the sun was a bit mild and then headed in the



opposite direction, passing the Rohingya camp on the way. About an hour later, there was this signboard -- Damdamia Forest. Our good friend at the forest department had talked about this place many a time before and insisted that we visited it

and trekked.

There are three trails here -- one hour, three-hour and five-hour, the local guide informed us. We chose the three-hour path. A beautifully designed office structure stood at the entrance to the forest by a pond. The innovative design

gave a feel of space and harmony with nature. It is the outcome of an architectural competition for an information centre, we were told.

The trail started right after the information centre. It wound around the lush green hills, gradually gaining height. We were suddenly lost in a world of tall trees. We were in bright sunlight a little while ago, but now a strange kind of muffled light engulfed us. The ground was still soggy from last night's dew and the blades of the wild grasses felt wet. But strangely, this forest did not sound of crickets. Only the



occasional buzz of the carpenter bees. We crossed a half-broken wooden bridge and climbed higher. As we looked down, it was a strangely beautiful world down below peeking through leaves and branches.

From here we started getting the strong stench of dung. A little later we found the object -- elephant droppings. The animals had grazed this patch of the forest last night, as the freshness of the poop proved. Last time we visited Teknaf, we had noticed the presence of an elephant

herd further to the south. We wondered if these belonged to the same herd or a different group roamed this place. It is amazing how clever these animals are. They had passed through trails so narrow that even we felt jittery to walk on them. We walked for another hour and all the way found their droppings.

Then we reached the peak. We checked the altimeter -- 720 feet. A nice round shed stood there. It is a resting place for trekkers. It was exactly what we needed now; we were all panting and sweating from the long climb. From here you could see the



MUNTASIR MAMUN



MUNTASIR MAMUN

Story: INAM AHMED
Photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN