

Star

HOLIDAY

DHAKA TUESDAY JULY 15, 2008

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BANGLADESH



WE were in the rain country and it was wet, wet, wet all around. We could feel the wetness through to our bones. And it was unbelievably green. It seemed we were floating on a green soup. In a surreal atmosphere.

We were heading towards Jafong and a black rain cloud hung low over us, swirling slowly, and then it started pouring. Our car windshield got blurred and the wiper worked overtime to make visibility clear. The empty asphalt road ran through a marshy land. Nothing grows here, we could see. Rain had lifted long reeds in clumps and in the strange low light they looked like the scenes of Ingrid Bergman's black and white movies. The silver water shimmered dull and bluish in the diffused afternoon light. Frogs croaked.

We felt desolated. We felt somehow hollow inside. We felt somehow anguished and embattled. Against life and civilisation. Against existence and trivialities. Of promises and broken notes. But then we stopped the car to bathe in the strange greenish sunlight that gently wrapped us around. We felt that we were immersing in a sea and our vision was getting murkier and murkier. We felt the gentle sweep of the palm trees. As if even the trees had been feeling that unexplained gloom.

Further on, the Jointa hills came into view. And they became bigger and bigger until it seemed we could just reach out and touch them. The undiluted hills looked blue under a thin veil of cloud, their tops invisible behind black



ominous clouds. The hill range stretched as far as the eyes went.

The clouds were flying in, in packs, and gliding over us. They mingled with the ridges before finally crossing over to cause more rains in Shilong and Cherapunji. No wonder, they are the wettest places on earth.

We arrived at a turn. Jafong is now only about eight kilometers and here the road had veered very close to the hills. The waterfalls were much clearer now. We stopped the car and got down again. As we cut the engine, the first thing we heard was the roar of the falls. A loud and deep noise, as if thousands of rocks rolling down a slope. And it was surprisingly a desolate place. Far into the valley down there were a few scattered thatched houses. Then the invisible borderline ran and across that a few

more houses dotted the Indian territory. We walked across the wet grasses and watched the wonderful waterfalls. Suddenly, the sun broke for a few moments and a brilliant light flooded over the hills and gleaned from the streaming water. A small rainbow appeared from the sprays of the waterfall. We watched this wonderful transformation in silence.

We were now at the district rest house at Naljhuri. A sprawling two-storey white building on a sloping knoll. The slope had been landscaped into a garden. Our rooms were on the top floor. A beautiful big balcony was awaiting us. And what a view you get from here. The long range of hills looked us into the eyes and the glistening waterfalls were there perpetually. The sound of the water

crushing onto slopes swept over us. A kite flew lonely on this landscape, looking for the last bit of food before retiring to nest. Its wet wings looking dark.

We were still sitting there and listening to the music of the waterfall when the night fell. On a cloudy monsoon evening, you don't feel the curtain dropping over the daylight. It just turns wetter and gloomier until you only have the darkness left. And you feel cold and lonely. Even the croaking of the frogs cannot break the wet silence.

A light came on at the top of the highest peak. Someone said it was the Indian security outpost. Rain started falling in torrents again and I shivered to think of all the wetness on top of the hill. The rest house suddenly sank into total darkness with a power cut. It was much better now -- this whole world was a one blob of blackness where you cannot differentiate any two objects. Only in the distant I could make out the ridges from the light deflecting from the security outpost.

Later in the night, I lay in my room and though the huge window watched the hill range that was so clear in its contour in the afterglow of a dull moon. I lay lost in the light of the moon. I lay lost thinking of Ratargul where I am going to see a wonderful world of a swamp forest on this trip.

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