



# Hotel Hunting in Cox's Bazar — Honeymoon Horror!

by Hure Tarzia Hossain

The newly-weds were ecstatic as they reached Cox's Bazar. "Nothing can dampen our spirits now!" thought Tarzia. "Nothing!"

It was a bright and sunny December afternoon when the two of us got down from the bus. After staying up all night on the train to the orchestra of a zillion mosquitoes, the four hour bus ride had been too much of an ordeal.

The windows of our Saudia Express Coach had been left open throughout the journey and almost all the passengers were covered with dust from top to toe. Personally, I thought the two of us looked very much like a couple of Red Indians.

Cox's Bazar town was bustling with activity. It seemed to me that the entire population of Chittagong had decided to come to Cox's Bazar for the Victory Day holidays.

With a little scouring, we managed to get a rickshaw-puller who agreed to take us to our destination — a resthouse where the locals had ever heard of. We thanked our lucky stars because by now we were thoroughly tired.

As the rickshaw began pulling away from the main town we started to chat with our rickshawpuller. My husband and I had both been to Cox's Bazar before on separate occasions. But this time it was different. This time we were on our honeymoon. Nothing could dampen our spirits now! Not a zillion mosquitoes, not the tickets for the air-conditioned buses being all sold out and certainly not the fact that we couldn't manage to get hotel reservations from Dhaka.

On our way to the resthouse we passed several hotels, all of which seemed booked full from the outside. I couldn't remember seeing so many hotels on my last visit to this beautiful beach resort. As we approached the beach road, our rickshaw suddenly came to a halt in front of a beautiful resthouse. From the sign we could tell that it was a Water Board resthouse and not the one we were looking for.

We convinced our friendly puller that this was not the place we were looking for. Our hotel should be at least another mile down the road. Then we were on our way again. The Beach road was lined with evergreens on both sides and we could see the sea in the distance. The view was spectacular. Occasionally a roadside motel would appear on the landscape. At places the beach and the ocean seemed only a stone's throw away. I could feel the sea breeze blowing in and lifting my hair. I could also smell drying fish.

We continued down this scenic road for a while and

then suddenly our rickshaw took a left turn and we came on to another road which was parallel to the one we had just left. This road was further away from the beach and the ocean. The traffic seemed to get a lot thinner now.

The left side of the road was bordered with small hillsides with sleepy villages nestled at their feet. After about half a mile, the gravel road ended and gave way to a dirt road. We could tell from the bulldozer in the distance that this portion of the road would soon be constructed.

The road seemed to drag on forever and by now we were convinced that the resthouse was much more than a mile down. In the distance we could hear very loud Hindi music.

As the music became louder and louder, we spotted a whitewashed two-storey building with a small patch of winter garden. "This is your destination," our puller announced.

As we got down at the gate we immediately understood that this building was the source of the terrible racket. I can't explain why, but as we were paying the fare, my husband and I both had the presence of mind to ask the puller to stay for a while.

As we entered the building, we saw a group of local youngsters playing a very old tape deck at full volume. The main occupants of the resthouse were seated at a large dining table. On seeing us, they immediately got up and greeted us. One of the men took us upstairs to our room. On our way up he informed us that their cook was on leave and that we would have to take our meals outside.

As the key clicked in the lock and the door opened, our gracious host informed us that this was the largest room in the resthouse and therefore it was reserved for VIPs. We felt quite honoured and embarrassed at this honest statement, but at the same time were just a twinge disappointed at the bare furnishings of the room. With a friendly goodbye, our host left us to unpack.

As we closed the door, my husband immediately rushed for the washroom. Before I could finish putting away our bags on the floor, he was back. From his face I could tell that something was wrong. In a nutshell, the toilet was absolutely unusable. As I ventured in to take a look for myself, I gasped in horror. It seemed to me that the toilet had not been used or cleaned in ages. I had never in my life seen a wash-room in such a terrible condi-

tion. Together we decided that this was no place to spend our honeymoon and we would immediately embark on a hunt for a proper hotel room. On our way down, the music seemed a little more tolerable. As we encountered our host again we asked him if he would be kind enough to arrange for a cleaner just in case... we could not bare to think about the eventuality of not getting a hotel room.

Our rickshawpuller greeted



us with a smile. It was obvious that he was glad to see us, but not half as glad as we were to see him standing in the exact same spot as we left him.

We were now in a very cheerful mood, thinking that everything was going our way. Little did we know what was in store for us just around the corner. As we entered the reception area of one of the twin Parjatan hotels Utal or Probal, I can't remember which, we got our fists shook.

All the rooms were booked full until the 16th. There was no way they could put us up before the morning of the 17th. From the receptionist we learned that the other twin hotel was also booked full till the 17th. As we left the foyer, we were a little disappointed but we were determined not to give up hope.

We continued with our hunt for a room. Unfortunately, each time we were turned down in the same manner. A desk clerk

in one of the hotels reminded us that we should be thankful that we had a roof over our heads tonight because a good number of people would probably have to spend the night in hotel lobbies or under an open sky.

As we came out into the daylight again, we found that the sun was setting. In our effort to find a hotel room, we had missed our very first sunset by the sea! But we had no time to worry about things like that now. After all, we were on

lowing morning. By now it was quite dark outside. It was getting colder by the minute. Together we decided that after taking all the trouble to get to Cox's Bazar, we could not let something as trivial as this spoil our honeymoon. We would make the best of it.

Our first priority was to buy tickets for Greenline for the trip back to Chittagong. We did this with great gusto, remembering the terrible, dusty and bumpy ride we had just had a

few hours earlier. By now it was very cold outdoors and we were feeling the folly of not bringing any warm clothes in our rush to locate a hotel room. We decided that it was time to head back to the resthouse.

As we headed back, we realized that the road to the resthouse did not have any street lights. The quaint little thatched cottages we'd seen earlier couldn't be seen, no matter how much I strained my eyes. The road had seemed very long then. It seemed endless now.

The only light by which we could occasionally get a glimpse of the road in front of us was a gigantic sweeping search light perched high on a vantage point on one of the hills. It was a very frightening experience for me. No matter how many books I had read of Jim Corbett or Kenneth Anderson, nothing could describe what I was feeling at that moment.

I would not have been in the least surprised had a leopard or a mad bull elephant suddenly dashed across the road. I knew perfectly well that there were no wild animals in the vicinity. But that knowledge could not put my mind at ease. Even the rickshawpuller's assurance that he knew this area like the palm of his hand could not stop me from expecting the worst.

As we treaded on my husband spotted a light in the distance. It was coming from Our Resthouse. I can't remember ever being so happy at seeing a place or knowing it was there.

At last! We were back at the resthouse. We thanked the rickshawpuller and over again and gave him a huge tip in addition to the normal fare. As we trotted up the stairs, I could think of just one thing — getting a good night's sleep for a fresh start in the morning.

The next morning we were awakened by the sunlight streaming into the room through chinks in the curtains. As we got up, we discovered that our room had a balcony which faced the road. We hadn't noticed it in our hurry the day before. Standing on the balcony, we could see the glimmering blue sea and a very long stretch beach — just waiting to be explored. The only thing that separated us from the beach was a small grassy field on which cows grazed.

It was a beautiful morning. The sheer beauty of the sunlight pouring down on everything erased the thought of all the unpleasant experiences of the day before. Right from that moment, we knew in our hearts what the rest of our stay would be like.

## Travel Briefs

**Passengers travel on KLM coaches:** KLM, the Royal Dutch Airlines, has started coach service for passengers travelling to and from Chittagong on their airlines. The passengers do not have to pay extra for this service which is operated by the Nirapad Paribahan Company.

Passengers are collected from Chittagong by KLM coaches to reach ZIA in time for check-ins. Passengers leaving for Chittagong are brought out as quickly as possible from the airport by KLM coach guides. This saves the passengers the hassle at airport concerning luggage.

**Expansion plans of New Pak Airline:** A new Pakistani airline, Shaheen Air International (SIA) has said that it planned to acquire two more Boeing 737 aircraft and smaller planes to expand its domestic and foreign services.

The airline is now operating for a year with two Boeing 737s leased from Thai Airways International and an Airbus A300. By the end of the year, the airline hopes to acquire two more Boeing 737s. — *BD Shipping Times*.

**Air India signs agreement:** Air India recently entered into an agreement with Boeing Commercial Airline Group for purchase of two more 747-400 passenger aircraft. The agreement was signed at the Air-India building, Bombay.

The total project cost is RS 1,137.70 crore including a foreign exchange component of US\$ 343.30 million. The project cost includes, apart from the aircraft, spares, spare engines and additional workshop and ramp equipment. — *Monitor*.

**Strong growth at Paris Airport:** The airports in Paris, Roissy and Orly, recorded above-average growth in airfreight in 1994.

The two airports currently offer the highest ULD capacity in Europe. Part of its tariff policy is to give 50 per cent discount in landing fees for freighters. — *BD Shipping Times*.

**KLM bids farewell to Ajay:** KLM Royal Dutch Airlines in Dhaka recently bade farewell to its station manager Ajay Dhawan at a party at a local hotel.

Cees Ursem, general manager of KLM, presented Ajay with Delhi porcelain plate and a painting. The new station manager Jan van der Veer was introduced to his colleagues at the party. — *Monitor*.

**Dubai to increase cargo capacity:** Dubai's airport plans to increase cargo handling capacity by 40 per cent to 350,000 tonnes within the next two years. As part of the expansion plans, a dedicated courier facility would be built in the cargo terminal in 1995.

DHL Worldwide Express, Federal Express Corp. and other small players were involved in the plans. — *BD Shipping Times*.

**BA offers check-ins by phone:** First and Business class passengers flying to London by British Airways (BA) can check in by phone or facsimile. Calls are to be made on the day of departure between 2pm and 9pm. Passengers are to provide their name, flight number, destination and the number of pieces of check-in luggage. — *Monitor*.

**JAL teams up with American Airlines:** Japan Airlines (JAL) has announced that it has finalised on agreement with American Airlines Inc.

JAL will participate in the Advantage Travel Awards programme and American Airlines will participate in JAL's tour regionally based frequent flyer programme — JAL sky plus in Japan, JAL Mileage Bank America, JAL Mileage Bank Europe and JAL Mileage Bank Asia and Oceania. — *Monitor*.

**IATA sees growth of passengers:** Asia Pacific will have over half the world's scheduled airline passengers by the year 2010, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said recently.

In its latest "air transport forecast" for the region, the 225 member body said that in 15 years time there would be some 398 million people flying annually to and from or within the Asia Pacific region. The estimated figure for the rest of the world based on returns from IATA airlines, was 390 million. — *BD Shipping Times*.

**Qantas named best carrier:** Qantas has been named as "Best Carrier to Australia and the Pacific" by the British magazine "Executive Travel" for the third year running. Air New Zealand was runner-up in the category with Ansett third. — *Monitor*.

## Travel Editor's Note

Passengers Complain; But what Can we Do, Says Biman



Flying high in the sky, Biman

Bangladeshi travellers go to a lot of trouble to book a seat in the Biman flight. A traveller may even have to pay money (bribe). In most cases, booking is refused because of the unavailability of seats. However, on boarding the flight passengers find the ship half-empty. Another complaint is the high price of tickets. Airlines like the Emirates, KLM etc. charge a lot less than Biman.

Our correspondent went and met a Biman official to find answers to these queries. "Most of our flights have several stop-overs. Not all passengers book their flights from Dhaka. The Dhaka-New York flight collects only 50% of its passengers from Dhaka. The rest board from Delhi, Dubai or Amsterdam. We must keep all options open. The seats remain vacant in order to collect passengers from other destinations, but passengers tend to

think that we cause them trouble on purpose," he said.

"On the matter of bribery, all I can say is that this kind of thing goes on in almost all organizations in Bangladesh," he added. Seats are booked for the passengers through computer. In the old days, seats were booked manually. All the informations regarding seat availability and flight schedule etc. are given to passengers from the computer. Sometimes, when the flights are in tight schedule and have a lot of overbooking, many passengers and travel agents crowd the counter in the hope of getting their seats booked.

When I asked him about the high price of tickets and how other airlines were willing to sell seats at much lower rates, he looked unsatisfied. "If they can give their tickets off free, who's stopping them? Why should they blame Biman? We

have to meet our expenditure. Moreover, all rates are fixed by the International Air Traffic Association (IATA). Our rates are not higher than those quoted by IATA. If other airlines are charging less than the quoted rates, then they are doing it against the rule."

Biman's ticket fare to London is almost the same as that to Kuwait; although it takes more than double the time to reach London than it does to reach Kuwait. This indicates that Biman is not unaware of the existing competition in the airline business, but it still remains the most misunderstood airline. — *RM*

**P.S. We're looking for funny travel stories. Perhaps a family trip that didn't quite turn out right, or a honeymoon nightmare (read our lead article). We pay Tk. 100 - 200 for all selected articles.**

## STOL Service to Start - At Last?

by Asiuzzaman

THE possibility of launching private airlines service in the country has brightened again. The authorities have modified guidelines to enable the entrepreneurs to start operation of the long-stalled short-take-off and landing (STOL) service in domestic routes.

Late last month the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism met with the Provisional Air Transport License (PATOL) holders. They reached a six-point agreement lifting some embargoes to allow STOL service to start in prescribed domestic routes.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Maj (retd) Abdul Mannan chaired the meeting held on March 22 which was attended by the owners and executives of Borak Air and Air Parabat.

The decisions taken at the meeting are as follows:

1) Regarding the VAT and import duty and also the fuel price, the companies initiating STOL service would have the same facilities as Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

2) All the domestic routes will be opened for STOL service subject to a consensus with Biman. Passengers for the international routes should fly exclusively in Biman.

3) PATOL holders will be allowed to procure 70 to 80-seat aircraft for STOL service. The private airlines should pay landing charge to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) at the rate Biman is now paying (for domestic operations).

4) Tejgaon airport will be the main airport for STOL service. But, whether or not the Zia International Airport (ZIA) can be used for STOL in

the future, will remain under consideration.

5) The companies can bring STOL aircraft on lease for one year and the PATOL holders should submit bonds specifying the time of starting the STOL service.

6) CAAB officials informed that it is possible to start the STOL by September next.

PATOL holders are quite satisfied about the outcome of the latest meeting. "The major reasons for the STOL service delay were discussed at the meeting," they said.

"There are some 'unusual' restrictions on the PATOL holders. The new minister has taken serious initiative to start the service," an owner of a pri-



Domestic air route map

## Have you Seen Her Deer Eyes?

by Gemini Wahhaj

"HAVE you seen deer eyes yet?" someone asked me as we stood on the launch at Katka.

"Why, I've seen whole deer!" I said proudly.

But I'm told that spotting a deer's eyes in the dark is a different experience altogether.

"They glow in the dark, like a pair of stars!" The master officer scanned the night with a torch. Nothing. Then someone brought out a stronger flashlight.

"Here! Here's one," yelled the master officer. "And here's another, and another!" Slowly, slowly, we began to see also. We saw the eyes, then whole bodies. We saw them walking through the trees, then on the water's edge, drinking.

We were all very excited by now. The launch's searchlights were turned on also to help us in our deer-sighting. Then we saw the forest guards approaching.

"They have better lights," our master officer said. They walked toward us on the bridge, stopped a moment, then turned around. On the way back, they turned their lights on the forest.

We held out our flashlight also, and the two lights crossed each other. And there we saw, clearly, a deer's glittering eyes, its red coat. Both lights followed it as it moved majestically through the forest. "The deer of the Sundarbans," they're beautiful, sighed the master officer. "They walk in rhythm, whole families in step, moving as if to some music."

vate company told The Daily Star.

Maj (retd) Abdul Mannan was transferred to the Ministry of Civil Aviation from the Textile last January. He said earlier that the seat capacity of STOL aircraft has now been raised from 20 to 80.

"It was not possible to make the service viable for a 20-seat aircraft," the owner said. "Huge import duty and VAT were other factors of the delay," he added.

The source said that the authorities finally agreed to reconsider opening of all the domestic routes for STOL service. According to previous guidelines STOL service could only operate in destinations where Biman does not operate.

The company owner said he had already printed tickets for several routes and almost completed other formalities needed to procure aircraft. The PATOL holder earlier did not get sincere cooperation from the authorities to start the service. He said that he would now revive his shelved plan and start the STOL service soon.

In August 1993, the cabinet approved a proposal from the Ministry of Civil Aviation to open up domestic skies for private airlines under the STOL service. So far the authorities issued nine PATOL to different companies but an authoritative source said all the companies are not seriously working to launch the STOL service.

A source in the CAAB said that the Borak Air and Air Parabat are in regular contact with them to start the STOL service. He expects positive response from them — soon.

— Degonto