



**W**HEN you are thinking of a tiger, it comes to you not only as a mighty striped animal but also with the myth, stories, aggressiveness behind it. And when you are after tigers in their native areas your mind must always be pre-occupied with the thought of the presence of this huge cat. All of your sensory organs become alert in the highest degree, not only while you are negotiating with deep dense gora bush or typha grass in Sundarbans meadows. It also haunts you during your leisure time when you rest in a boat or in a rest house.

Sensitivity of the organs are increased to such a height that even very minor events may shatter your balance completely. Later, when you are out of the grim shadow of jungle shock, the events may appear to you as funny memories. It can be the good subject of many table stories but at those moments your experience is a horrifying one.

One fine morning I was walking through the Sundarban forest with four comrades, two of them carried four rifles on their shoulders. The area Hishamari lies almost in the middle of the Sundarbans. The forest is densely covered by Sundari and Gewa trees. The Sundari trees have long, hard and pointed breathing roots and it is very difficult to walk on these. The Sundarbans have some effective weapons to restrict human interference. Besides tigers, crocodiles, wild boars, and venomous snakes; there are the breathing roots of Sundari and Kewra, the undergrowths like Hental Horgaza and loose mud-traps. Of them all I dislike two things, garan bush and shulas (breathing roots) of Sundari tree.

In those areas we came across both. I was in the

# Terror Moments

by Khasru Choudhury

front by the side of a forest guard, and my remaining comrades were following us at a distance of ten metres. One of them got stuck in mud, so we made a halt while enjoying his dilemma. We didn't notice our forest guard advance in the direction of the hudo shrub. Suddenly we heard an unusual noise which broke the silence of the jungle. I missed a beat and felt my heart jump up in fear. The forest guard was also trembling. My friend, who was still stuck in the mud, started to scream at the top of his voice. On his face was the expression of total fear.

Later we discovered that the event was a simple one. As we were advancing through the sulas a red jungle fowl was probably trying to catch some crabs. As it had no intention to draw our attention it just hid itself in the hudo bush. Our forest guard had unknowingly stepped on it, making it frightened. The weary cock in order to get rid of us, broke out of its cover like a moving bullet crocking and beating its wings, which produced a terrifying sound. After we discovered what had actually all of us started to laugh. What a relief it was not a tiger, as we thought.

One evening, on that same trip, we went on a canoe ride. As we didn't have any intention to get off the boat, we were carried some torch-lights only. As we passed we could only see the outline of the forest and the rest fell in complete darkness. We were at distance of ten feet from the bank and could hear the crickets, owls, night guard, distance alarm call of a dis-

tressed chital doe. We were drifting in silence. I lit my torch in the direction of the left bank and it fell upon two glowing eyes. A moment later we heard a splash, which meant that the animal must have jumped into the lake. Fearing a lurking tiger had jumped into the water we cried to the boat-

barge for peaceful sleep at night. The barge was anchored merely ten feet from the bank of Chorabetmore river and was three feet above the water level. We were all engrossed in interesting tiger stories.

Although it was a January night there had been a little rain in the evening and the

of the camp area. The tiger had not tried to secure any human prey but it once tried to catch a chicken from beneath a kitchen platform while the cook was on his duty.

This information made us a little worried since the doors and windows of our cabins did not have any shut-



man to turn the boat the towards mild stream. As we frantically lit our torches, our boatman suddenly recognised the animal to be a huge crocodile and.

Tiger stories can sometimes be very engaging if narrated by a good story teller in favourable atmosphere. One day we settled ourselves on a

overcast cloud made the night warm. As the Khulna Newsprint mill's operational office of chorabetmore gave us permission and accommodation for night halt in their periphery, they also informed us that a tigress had dropped one of its cubs. The tigress was therefore a regular visitor with her offspring

ters. Our distance of ten feet from the shore was no barrier for the man-eater. Mr Karim, honorary consultant of WWF and a conservationist was narrating a story about the Sundarban man-eaters.

At 11 o'clock in the night we decided to call it a day. Within minutes we all fell asleep. But about half-an-hour

later I woke up to some unusual frightful sounds. It sounded like an animal trying to drag out one of my companions. As the sound came from my right I assumed that it was Mr Chinnoy Mutsuddy, associate editor of weekly Bichitra, had fallen victim while sleeping. I did not know what to do and the only thought that came to me was the tiger should flee with his prey.

After some moments my brain started to work. It occurred to me that the tiger would not take so much time to drag the body out. Moreover, it would have to step over others in order to reach Chinnoy Da. Also I did not hear any sounds before, although some man-eating tiger kill silently.

Very slowly I opened my eyelids expecting to see a horrifying scene. The room was lit by the moon and didn't see anything unusual but the sound could be still heard. Meanwhile, the rest of my companions were also awakened by the noise. I mustered enough courage to look at Chinnoy da. I caught hold of his left arm and shook it violently to wake him up. Finally he woke up to tell his story.

In his dream he felt the tigress board the barge, select him as its prey, and bury its canine teeth into his throat. He was so frightened that he lost courage to even scream. The agonised sound which we heard, came out automatically - he knew nothing about that.

I think our tiger stories and persisting supernatural atmosphere were the main culprits for his immense misery.

After hearing his story, all of us laughed a good deal. But I must admit that it is not at all unusual for a man entering a tiger-infested forest like Sundarban to be struck by jungle shock.

## Travel Briefs

**Dubai Airport to increase capacity:** Dubai's airport plans to increase cargo handling capacity by 40 per cent to 350,000 tonnes within the next two years, said Sultan Saeed bin Nasser Al Mansoury, director general of the airport's cargo terminal.

As part of the expansion plans, a dedicated courier facility would be built in the cargo terminal. To meet steadily growing demand a second cargo agents building would be erected, with construction due to begin early next year.

—BD Shipping Times

**New Liner Service:** Atlantic Conbulk services, a new liner service between Montreal and Antwerp was due to be introduced in mid-June offering departures at 17 days intervals.

It will accept containers and conventional breakbulk and bulk. Atlanta ship management SA, Freiburg Switzerland is the managing agent.

—BD Shipping Times

**UASC announces losses:** The United Arab Shipping Company of Saudi Arabia has announced losses of between USD 30 and 40 million for 1994.

The results compare with losses of USD 73 million in 1993 and around 33 million in 1992. Officials say that the results are due to a decline in shipping rates, world recession and growing competition.

**Sharjah Cargo up:** The amount of cargo handling at Sharjah International Airport rose 23% from 17,402,904 kg to 22,679,744 kg during March this year compared with March 1994.

The airport broke its existing record in sea/air freight during the same period, with nearly 23,000 tons being handled during the month.

**Beijing to think about EU route:** China is being urged by international airlines flying to Europe from Hongkong to change its new routing system, which has increased flying times and costs. The new routing system introduced by Chinese authorities to deal with the ever increasing traffic over southern China has added 84 km more to Europe-bound airlines leaving Hongkong.

Airlines company said that the new west-only route had made it more difficult to guarantee that flights would be non-stop. The new air route meant about 15 minutes more flying time and at least 2,000kg more of fuel must be carried.

—BD Shipping Times

**Anointment of a new Thai airbus:** The anointment of the 6th Thai Airways International Public Company's Airbus A330-300 was held at the Ramp of the domestic terminal of Bangkok Airport. Following the anointment, a demonstration flight was organized, flying the deputy prime minister. THAI president etc.

—THAI

## Magnate Launches Rescue Mission for Asia's First Airline

by Casiano Mayor

**T**HERE was no trace of excitement on his face when he came out of a board meeting that voted him chair and chief executive officer of the Philippine Airlines at the Manila Peninsula Hotel in January.

For Lucio Tan, a low-profile but controversial business magnate of Chinese descent, already owns a string of businesses in the Philippines and in other parts of the world, taking over a new company might have been just another day in the office.

But the Philippine Airlines could not be just another company not even for someone of Mr Tan's obvious business acumen. Asia's first airline is now arguably the region's most troubled air transport firm, its rise and fall almost running parallel to the changing fortunes of the Philippines itself, which until a few years ago was generally considered as the sick man in Asia.

The task of keeping the planes of the nation's ailing flag carrier flying could prove the toughest challenge ever faced by a man whose legendary rags-to-riches story enabled him to build up a highly diversified business conglomerate and a reputation in some sectors of having the fabled Midas touch.

Mr Tan, who took over PAL's reins as head of PR Holdings Incorporated, a consortium that owns 67 per cent of the airline, faces not only stiff market competition but also a pocket rebellion in the board, three hostile workers' unions and an apparently uneven playing field laid down by a government caught in the flux of liberalizing the aviation industry.

His first and most pressing assignment is to turn around a company which registered US\$ 10.4 billion (P270 billion) in losses in the last 10 years and is projected to lose at least US\$3 billion more (P69 billion) in the next two years.

To stave off further losses, the new PAL chair has asked the stockholders to infuse P2.5 billion (US\$ 96.15 million) in fresh money to improve the airline's services and make it competitive, repay loans and meet maturing obligations as part of its P3.2-billion (US\$123 million) five-year expansion programme.

Also part of Mr Tan's rescue plan is the raising of P8 billion (US\$ 307 million) to pay the retirement benefits of at least 3,000 employees. PAL — a favourite dumping ground for political appointees when it was in government's hands — has a staff

**'It's not only the competition that hurts PAL. What hurts most are the unfair regulations imposed by government'**

of 14,000 employees, which is considered much too big for its needs.

A study by a London financial consultancy firm, which was commissioned by PAL, recommended early retirement for between 3,000 and 5,000 workers and the reshuffling of 3,000 others to improve productivity and avoid duplication of work. It pointed out that an airline the size of PAL needs only 4,000 workers.

Certainty that the unions will oppose any retrenchment moves has made management go slow on any move to get rid of the 10,000 or so extra hands.

The move by the Philippine National Bank (PNB), the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Retirement Services and Benefits System (AFP-RSBS) will restore government control of the airline, which has been in private hands for only four months.

PAL's three workers' union picketed in May in front of the airline's main office in Makati city, the Philippines' financial centre, to protest the hiring of 15 Malaysian pilots for four Boeing 747-400 jetliners

industry.

PAL officials have complained that President Fidel Ramos' Executive Order 219, which liberalizes the aviation industry, has not only exposed the flag carrier to open competition but also lessened its ability to compete fairly. With the "open skies" policy, the airline is no longer the country's only official flag carrier. At least two international airlines will be sharing that distinction.

Currently, PAL has domestic competition from four new airlines — Grand Air, Cebu Air, Silangan Air and Star Asia Airways. The entry of Pacific East Asia Cargo, the Federal Express, DHL and UPS courier services is also likely to cut into its cargo revenue.

"It's not only the competition that hurts PAL. What hurts most are the unfair regulations imposed by government. For instance, while opening the industry to free competition, the government wants PAL to take the unprofitable routes and give the profitable ones to its competitors," said a close associate of Mr Tan.

"That's like telling PAL to commit suicide. If you liberalize an industry, you should leave its regulation to market

**Certainty that the unions will oppose any retrenchment moves has made management go slow on any move to get rid of the 10,000 or so extra hands.**

while 26 Filipino pilots are being trained at Boeing's headquarters in Seattle, Washington.

The picket appeared to be a warning as well to the new leadership not to cross the workers, thus, offering a glimpse of the potentially stormy relationship between management and the workers' unions, which are wary of Mr Tan's "anti-labour" reputation.

The spectre of more serious strikes looms as the three unions — for ground workers, pilots and flight attendants — renegotiate their collective bargaining agreements simultaneously this year and demand new wage increase and benefits.

There is trouble in other fronts as well. Management's efforts to turn PAL from being a milking cow of political appointees into a profitable private company may be further slowed by the state policy to liberalize the airline

forces and not throw in monkey wrenches there," he told Depthnews.

Mr Tan is not alone in fighting government on the issue. Even the usually critical newspapers have joined the airlines' clamour for government to get its hands off the local airline industry.

"PAL's pleas for government to level the playing field are certainly valid and fair," wrote Manila newspaper columnist Ermin Garcia, Jr. "Lucio Tan may not be the epitome of an ideal Filipino industrialist who should control PAL, but he is a Filipino nonetheless."

"It is bad enough that PAL is told to continue subsidizing unprofitable domestic routes, but to allow its financially stronger competitors to eat up whatever market share it has in profitable routes, without any stake in 'subsidized routes,' is downright unfair," he added.

Industrialist Enrique

Zobel agrees: "If the government believes that the 'open skies' policy is best for the Filipino people, well and good. It should pursue the policy to the maximum, irrespective of whoever gets affected. At the same time, however, it must totally free PAL to compete with newer rivals, who have fewer restrictions on their operations."

"The government... must let go of PAL once and for all. This is the first step on the way to recovery. Let PAL flounder or fly in the face of new competition. Let it fend for itself," he added.

While Mr Tan seemingly can only anticipate more trouble ahead, at least in the near future, the few steps he has taken so far to bail out the troubled airline appear to be paying off. Company officials said since Mr Tan took over PAL's helm in January, the nation's flag carrier has saved some US\$ 52 million from aircraft purchases, new negotiations of lease contracts and other cost-cutting measures.

In April, the new management finalized the purchase of a brand new Boeing 717-400 at US\$ 18 million, a price less than what was paid for two of the same aircraft bought by the previous management in 1993. Terms of negotiated leases contracted by the new management on four B747-200 aircraft saved the company US\$ 705,228 on monthly lease payments.

To save on operating costs, the company has decided to reduce flying time and cut down on parking, maintenance and fuel costs from its international routes. It has reduced the B747's sitting capacity from 439 to 390 to allow for more legroom, accommodate more cargoes and be able to fly non-stop to the United States West Coast without a stopover in Honolulu, which costs about US\$ 20,000 per landing.

Other measures include the re-negotiation of tow truck fees at US\$18 million less than the price set by previous airline officials and the use of locally-sourced airplane toilet, sanitizing chemicals, which the previous management bought from the US at a price tenfold higher.

But the man, who legend says peddled pans and kettles on the streets of Cebu City on his way to the top of the business ladder, is not out of the woods yet despite these modest accomplishments. Flying Asia's oldest flag carrier is likely to be the toughest challenge he has faced so far. *Depthnews Asia.*

## Jaisalmer : A Desert City

by Fyyaz Shahnoor

**T**HE Advanced Learners dictionary defines the word desert as "an area of land without trees or water, often covered with sand". A dictionary seldom lies, yet unfortunately it also fails to depict the true imagery that a word may convey. If you've always been fascinated by the word desert and believe that actual experience is far better than mere descriptions, than Jaisalmer in Rajasthan is the place for you.

Situated in the far western tip of India, Jaisalmer lies in the midst of the Great Indian Desert. Jaisalmer is no typical desert city. It was once

rounding a small hill. A quiet arrogance emanates from its cobbled streets and narrow alleys. Most of the houses are pale two storeyed buildings with intricate patterns adorning the entrances. These patterns on stone are called Jaffri and are the speciality of local artisans whose trade has been handed down from generation to generation for more than 500 years. The only colorful aspect of the city are its local inhabitants. Local men wear flashy turbans in direct contrast with their greyish-white dhutti's and women decorate themselves with heavy steel arm bands and

places, shrines and temples are scattered in all directions. However the place has been able to retain its impression of antiquity.

Stone seems to be the most popular building materials of the past. The total lack of greenery gives one an eerie feeling amidst the stone houses and streets. The places to visit here are the Rang Mahal, the Moti Mahal and the Sarbattam Bilash.

From the verandas of the Rang Mahal you can get a breathtaking birds eye view of the city below. These Mahals are a fusion of small rooms creating a very confusing maze. The unimindful

stones. At the very center (where the Maharaja would sit) the air is very cool. Just sitting there gives one a sense of power and pride, that man has indeed, to a certain extent, been able to conquer nature.

Apart from the ancient relics the true attraction of Jaisalmer lies in its desert sand dunes. An hour's ride to the west on a jeep will take you there. If you want you can stop at the occasional village with its low mud huts huddled close together as if shrinking away in shyness from the sun.

Leaving the village as you go further west you make a striking discovery. The villages suddenly cease to exist. The shrubs become fewer and far between. At this point you might catch the occasional glimpse of a sand dune. Then a time comes when all you can see is sand. If you feel really adventurous you can stop the jeep and finish the remaining part of your journey on camel. You are sure to find men with camels waiting on the road side. The Indian camel has one hump and can carry two persons. The camel *kafela* will take you through the sand dunes at a leisurely pace. You will surely be stunned by the vast expanse of uninhabited dunes. It is a wonderful experience to watch the sand waves which are blown in by wind. In local language these waves are called *Barkhan*.

Finally the sand dunes come into view. These dunes are very high and they look as if some gigantic hand has just scooped up some sand in order to build them. It's great fun to run up and down the craters. A lot of tourists are seen roaming around here. If the journey hasn't already drained all your energy out then start walking until you find yourself stranded on a lone sand dune. Lie there on the cool sand and watch the sun go down. It's amazing to see the color of the sand change as the sun slowly sets.

If you arrive early then you can hire some camels and go on a small safari. The camel herders will take you along the sand dunes until you reach the India-Pakistan border. If you are a very romantic then I'm sure you would like to spend a night at the sand dunes. A tourist lodge has been built in the middle of no-where, by the government. It boasts all modern conveniences including a bar.

Jaisalmer is a relatively new tourist spot. The Rajasthan Tourist Authority is actively promoting it as a major tourist attraction. So if you want to avoid the horde of tourists that are soon going to mar it's sanctity, you better start soon.



the dwelling place of Maharajas. Travel weary bedouins used to grace its market places and fort. Today it is a popular tourist spot and boasts a rich cultural and architectural heritage.

The season to visit Jaisalmer is from January to March. At that time the weather is agreeable and different cultural festivals are held by the local inhabitants. To reach Jaisalmer you have to go from Delhi through Jaipur and Jodhpur. The journey can be made both by bus and train. The city many hotels, so accommodation should not be a problem. You can contact one of the many tourist services in the city who offer different sight-seeing packages at various price ranges.

The city itself is very small. It is situated on an uneven stretch of land sur-

rounding a small hill. A quiet arrogance emanates from its cobbled streets and narrow alleys. Most of the houses are pale two storeyed buildings with intricate patterns adorning the entrances. These patterns on stone are called Jaffri and are the speciality of local artisans whose trade has been handed down from generation to generation for more than 500 years. The only colorful aspect of the city are its local inhabitants. Local men wear flashy turbans in direct contrast with their greyish-white dhutti's and women decorate themselves with heavy steel arm bands and

necks.

The fort of Jaisalmer is situated at the top of the hill. People lovingly call it *Shonar Kella* after the movie that Satyajit made on this very same location. This ancient relic was built in the 12th century by Maharaja Rai Jaisal. He was a member of the Bhatti Rajput sect. He had built this fort after being banished from his original capital Lodhrva by Mohammed Gori.

As you enter the fort the massive wooden doors will overwhelm your sense of perception. You will be marveled at the intricately carved designs on its outer rim. Through the doors a narrow winding path will lead you to the main courtyard. There, within the circular constraint of the gigantic fort walls you will find a bustling city. Hotels, houses, market