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**THAILAND**



## Capt Cox's Bazar

I N love with Nature, the winds and the waves. The blue waters reflecting the clouds that float by for the lovers eye. The playful mirth of the surf crashing onto a beach painted silver by the moon shining in the heavens.

The only word to describe the feeling on first glimpse is breathtaking. It's love at first sight. Hard it may be to comprehend, but it is the same feeling each time the rolling waves come into view. And it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that this is unique to Cox's Bazar. One of the reasons could be the wide expanse of sandy beach leading onto the picture-perfect blue waves tossing the surf to the winds. Another reason, the cool blue radiance lifting off

warring among the peoples of the region had finally ended in victory for the Burmese. They avenged themselves on the defeated Araknese in what today's world has come to know as ethnic cleansing. The Moguls had given the British East India Company the right to govern Chittagong upto the Naf river. When Burmese king Bodhpaya's purges forced thousands of refugees to flee the land, they crossed the Naf river and sought refuge in Ramu and the southern coastal belt of Chittagong. This area now being the domain of the East India Company, they had little choice but to deal with the refugees. The East India Co appointed a superintendent for the rehabilitation of the Arakanese refugees. 1799 Capt Hiram Cox had arrived. In the land that still bears his name. This too is unique in a world where the fortunes of war or politics determine the name game. Earlier Capt Cox had been the company Resident in Rangoon and therefore familiar with the local cultures and conflicts. He had actually arrived in India in 1779 as a cadet. By 1796 his prowess in the Bengal Frontier Regiment Infantry got him promotion as Battalion Captain. But luck deserted him in Rangoon and he ended up in the malaria infested jungles of Chittagong. Tasked with the rehabilitation of the refugees Capt Cox Formulated a policy whereby the refugees could settle in one place and govern themselves according to their traditional laws. The company had earmarked the northern

areas of Chittagong for refugee rehabilitation but Capt Cox allowed them to remain in the southern parts where they had already settled. The reasoning was based on sound ground. First the refugees would be with Arakanese who had settled earlier but most of all because they would clear the malaria infested jungles for cultivation. So the East India Co agreed to settle the refugees along the southern banks of the Bankkhali river. Not so, declared Sher Mustafa Khan, Kalli Charan, Saaduddin, Mir Chand Gouri Shankar and Shibchand Ray. These half a dozen feudal landlords, Zamindars, laid claim to the land. Capt Cox referred the matter to the Board of Revenue, requesting

mother. Primroses decorated the doorway, carnations lined the walkway right up to the fence where the sweetpeas were already withering. No, Winter couldn't be far behind. But it wasn't winter yet and the fairs, fun and frolic rolled on. This could be anywhere in England, she knew, but what would a hot humid Burmese jungle be like? He didn't really have to go, but the British Raj made men of boys and strangely men always seemed to have a driving compulsion to prove they were men. Though this often triggered events which forced them onto currents beyond their thought regimes. Little did she suspect how the currents flowing down the Naf river would ebb out her own

man and basked in the glorious admiration of the administered. To the Arakanese Capt Cox had become a saviour fit to be worshipped.

In 1799 Superintendent of Immigrants Capt Hiram Cox set up a small colony of 10,000 Arakanese refugees in the village of Aung Sun Tha which came to be called Cox's Bazar.

This influence of Arakanese still adds an aura of the exotic orient to Cox's Bazar. The Rakhaines add another colourful hue to the windswept southern shores though they are hugely outnumbered by Bengalis. It is truly remarkable to see how a people so different in culture religion, language and food habits from the dominant local

police station Dhiraj Bhattacharya, a hindu, fell in love with Ma Thin and married her. His infuriated father summoned him away to Kolkata. Ma Thin pined away refusing food and accepting water, only from the well, to perhaps drown her sorrows and finally died a tragic death. Just before Dhiraj returned. The ebb and tide of animosity between religions did not return Ma Thin.

A short drive down the beautiful beach is Himchhari. Development has put a concrete tourist bungalow on top of a beautiful hill. Nature has taken a 100 or so steps back in angry red scars cut into the hillside. But then the beauty is on the beach against the backdrop of green

Stonehouse paid respect on behalf of the governor general of India. At this point the rebel leader of the Arakanese, Sin Piyan, came forward and requested that they be allowed to bid farewell to Capt Cox in their own traditions. In life Cox had been their messiah. In death he had achieved Nirvana. The Arakanese raised his coffin onto their shoulders, chanting their own mantras. Then at the behest of San Piyan the Arakanese refugees poured all their gold silver, gems and ornaments into the grave. The Englishmen watched in silent amazement. The refugees sang and danced. Cox was lowered into the grave and tears turned to cheers of joy. All except Nancy's. She stood



the waves, lifting the spirits. For a world in search of alternative medicine, the therapeutics of the wind blown music of the waves could be the magic.

It wasn't the magic though, that brought a young British Captain to this beautiful beach. Hundreds of years of internecine



a Commission to determine ownership of the lands. The Company appointed Hiram Cox Superintendent and Commissioner and informed him that none but they had rights to the land. In typical British management fashion the new superintendent sought to create a road from Ramu to Ukha Ghat ensuring quick access from the center. Obviously the Arakanese refugees would provide the labour, for which 3,500 spades were ordered by the Board of Revenue from the Dhaka Collectorate. Capt Cox had literally made inroads into the hearts and minds of the refugees. He then proceeded to distribute lands and almost a ton of foodgrains to each family of six all to be repaid in three years. The gratitude of the refugees was eternal.

The English countryside with rolling hills and dales, fields of daisies dahlias and daffodils is the prettiest of sights in spring. The beauty is fleeting at best, withered by a short hot August. 'If summer is here can winter be far behind' wondered Nancy as she stepped out of her dainty little cottage where she lived with her

destiny. On this lovely English morning that was a river too far. Merriment was on hand and many young men too. The boisterous laughter of ladies young and old, as they grandiosed about their membership privileges in the colonies and the tales of the men mixing in, to make the exploited look ridiculous and brown, was common but yet with undeniable appeal. In the hot August sun the cool shade of a native holding up a frilled parasol was an inviting idea. Why stay with chilled lemonade when the peshtashebet was being wasted down the throats of debauch Nabobs and Rajas. Tales of the temptatious orient were all aglow with the splendor and magnificence of rubies, pearls, emeralds and diamonds; not just the right of the royalty but of all the British. Oh, add to that the right of the white to show both the kafirs and the Saracens the highway to heaven.

So it was really divine will that took Capt Cox and thousands like him to the Far East, to be joined at appropriate times by their adoring women. Nancy watched the administrative abilities of her

population could survive and retain their ethnicity. That the Rakhaine women do most of the work, is not intended as another tourism technique but a continuation of a male dominated inequity. Its not a pretty sight to see men lazing around smoking while the women are tilling the lands, tending the babies and toiling over the fire. The colourful scarves and lungees woven and worn by the Rakhaine women are a reflection of their vibrant spirits. Moonlit nights call for merry-making with all its ingredients, singing, dancing and drinking. The men sing interesting tunes.

Between the Bankhali river and the Bay of Bengal is the world's longest unbroken sea-beach, 125 kilometers, down to Teknaf, the southern-most tip of Bangladesh. Here even till today, in the compound of the police station is the well-known water-well of Ma-Thin, holding in its depths another lover's tragedy. Ma Thin daughter of the Magh King with her countries, would come and spend afternoons and evenings sitting beside the well. The officer-in-charge of the

hill-forests is perhaps unique only to Cox's Bazar.

Another 8 km across the waters from Teknaf is the pristine island reserve of Narikel Zinjira. That's what the local call the only coral island of Bangladesh. It is better known as St Martin's island, named after a governor of the British Raj. A veritable underwater aquarium, huge varieties of shells including mother of pearl, an equally large variety of fish including flying fish and dolphins inhabit the waters around the island. Living corals swaying tantalizingly can be seen even 5 or 6 meters deep, through the lovely lucid waters.

A hundred kilometers north near Ramu, Capt. Cox lost his fight against malaria. Born in 1759 in England, the saviour of the Arakanese died, aged only 39. His coffin draped in the colours of the Union Jack was placed on a dais. British soldiers under the command of Major Morgan paid military tribute. A 19-gun salute was fired. Half a dozen Zamindars placed floral wreaths on his coffin. The mahouts had their majestically decorated elephants trumpet with raised trunks. Magistrate John

weeping motionless with a bouquet of flowers to place on his grave, on the bank of the Bankkhali river. A place they had both loved to come to. To walk under starlit skies. For a breath of fresh air even as malarial fever wracked his body. She placed her little bouquet and stepped back. Lightning streaked across the sky and thunder rocked the banks. Natures tribute? Then came the pouring rains. Sin Piyan's soldiers stood guard. But in high tide and amid the torrential rains the whole bank of the river collapsed and raging torrents washed Cox's grave away to the sea. Folk tales had it that the sea always returned the bodies. Nancy came back day after day and stood still till the darkness of night hoping the sea would return the body of Capt Cox. It did not. A heartbroken Nancy left. Cox's name remained, despite the shifting sands of time.

(This is not intended to be a historically accurate document. Dramatic possibilities played a part.)

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