

Cox's Bazar and tourism

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MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

By popular choice, Cox's Bazar has recently been ranked as one of the 'New Seven Wonders of the World'. A favourite spot for many in Bangladesh, this fishing port with its adjoining and unbroken 125 km of natural, gentle, sloping sandy beach, has once again emerged as an important potential tourist destination.

Located 150 km south of Chittagong, in south eastern Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar derived its name from Captain Hiram Cox, an officer of the British East India Company who was appointed as the Superintendent of that outpost after Warren Hastings became the Governor General of Bengal. A compassionate soul, Cox successfully mediated in the century long conflict between Arakan refugees and local Rakhains. He also made significant progress in the rehabilitation of refugees in the area. Unfortunately, he passed away prematurely in 1799 before he could complete his task. Nevertheless, the local population decided to honour this civil servant's memory by building a small market near the beach and naming it after him -- Cox's Bazaar (Cox's Market).

My only visit to this beautiful destination had been in January 1971. I failed to revisit the scene subsequently, either due to shortage of time or conflicting engagements. Consequently, when I received an invitation recently to attend an important meeting

being held there, I decided to take up the opportunity. I did so with some trepidation.

I wanted to savour the sea but also wanted to find out whether necessary tourist facilities had evolved over the last four decades in and around this stunning location. I wanted to ascertain why Cox's Bazar was lagging behind as a major international tourist destination. The important question was whether this was just due to lack of publicity or was it due to absence of necessary associated factors related to international tourism. I received my answers on both accounts.

I travelled to that scenic town by bus from Chittagong. It took about three and half hours to complete the distance. There was also the possibility of flying into Cox's Bazar from Dhaka and Chittagong but I went by bus to find out whether road conditions were difficult and whether access was hampering tourism into that region. I must admit that the meandering road was relatively narrow, but the surface conditions were quite good. The bus in which I travelled was also quite comfortable.

This time round, it was clear that this coastal city (with a population of slightly over 52,000) was emerging as a tourist spot. It reminded me of what Pataya, Thailand was in 1982. It was apparent that the service sector and tourism (3 lakh visitors in 2008) had become the major source of the local economy. I met several young entrepreneurs who were involved

in arranging domestic transportation for visitors to take them to nearby religious centres -- of interest of the Buddhist community -- or to other scenic spots like Aggmeda Khyang, a large Buddhist monastery, or to Ramu (with its many temples, khyangs and pagodas containing delicate wood carvings and images of Buddha in gold, bronze and other metals inlaid with precious stones).

I also came across weavers who were plying their trade in open workshops and craftsmen making handmade cigars in their pagoda like houses. There was also small market where sea products made out of pearls, oyster and snail shells were available. Similarly, there was evidence of small-scale agriculture, marine and inland fishing and salt production along the coast. There was also the all-pervading smell of drying fish and 'shutki' (not necessarily always welcome to international visitors).

The adjoining regions near the beach were filled with hotels, guest houses, and motels. There was also evidence that the real estate industry was busy not only in building apartment blocks but also in trying to sell the western idea of time-sharing ownership contracts. This was interesting.

I joined the other participants of the meeting in their courtesy trips to several spectacular sights near Cox's Bazar. This included spending time in -- Laboni Beach, the main beach of Cox's Bazar and closest to the town; Himchhari, located about 18 km south of Cox's Bazar along the sea beach and the Enani Beach located 35 km south of Cox's Bazar within Ukhia Thana. It may be mentioned here that this last spot was particularly welcomed because of it being a white sandy beach and also being shark and jelly fish free (ideal for sea bathing). Visiting Himchhari and Enani were particularly a

pleasure because of the improved road network. They were mostly inaccessible in January 1971. Here was infrastructure building at work.

Some hotel tourist operators also took the opportunity of our presence to remind us of our proximity to other nearby probable touristic destinations near the Cox's Bazar coast. They drew our attention to the charms of Maheshkhali island, its mangrove forests, its temples and pagodas; to the beauty of Sonadia island, its coastal lagoon, its migratory bird population and its beds of window pane oysters; to Teknaf (the southern-most part of mainland Bangladesh) and its facility of river cruises along the Naf river and also of eco-trips to St. Martin's island, home to several endangered species of turtles and coral reefs.

The visit indicated that there was immense potential for tourism. It also clarified some of the obstacles that were affecting growth of international interest in this sector in this region.

I consider that the following points need to be addressed with greater seriousness if we are to achieve the promise of this destination.

I felt that there is need for arranging greater security for visitors, particularly women and children. Concerted efforts must be undertaken to free the different spots near the beach from the pestering of beggars. That is required to help improve the image. The municipal authorities also need to give sufficient attention towards sanitation and drainage (overflowing sewage) and destroying the breeding zones of mosquitoes. In addition, most of the town looks run down and could do with a coat of fresh paint. That would brighten up the atmosphere. The pitiable street lighting also does not inspire confidence for a walk in the evening along the



Cox's Bazar: A wonder of the world?

coast-line with one's family.

There is also practically very little to do after the sun sets -- where visitors can enjoy their evenings either listening to music or having a decent meal in clean surroundings, overlooking the sea. In addition, there is the question of having clean public toilets near the beach and sufficient changing rooms so that bathers and visitors can take a shower with normal water and then wear dry clothes after a swim in the sea. This could be made sustainable by making them available on payment basis.

Lastly, there is need for the domestic tour operators to ensure that there is an increase not only in the frequency of flights and passenger capacity into Cox's Bazar per day from different points within Bangladesh (to facilitate domestic tourism) but also from neighbouring points like Kolkata, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and

Kathmandu. This might need improving the existing runway to handle bigger aircraft. This will then enable international tourists to take a break in that town on their way to Kathmandu or back to Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur.

The above improvements will need investment and additional resources. However, that expenditure could be met through public-private partnership. Capacity building within the tourism sector would also provide additional employment opportunities in the services sector.

All these factors juxtapose together and affect demand and listing among international tourist operators. I can only hope that these will be addressed suitably by our responsible authorities.

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Alternative source is a must

Electricity is the driving force behind economic progress. There is hardly any sector or person that can do without electricity. In the face of acute shortage of power, the pent up resentment of the people is likely to burst into widespread protests spilling into rallies, clashes and even ransacking of public properties.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

UNDENIABLY true a nation, mired in unending crisis and courting disaster with alarming frequency and desperate to chart out a road map for progress, development and self-sufficiency, must focus its attention on two core issues: education and electricity. Steeped in a culture of ignorance and bad politics, our leaders and bureaucrats have long discarded these two primary objectives simply because of lack of vision, competence and vested interest.

Electricity is the driving force behind economic progress. There is hardly any sector or person that can do without electricity. Even the farmer in the remotest village wants electricity for irrigation purposes. In the face of acute shortage of power, the pent up resentment of the people is likely to burst into widespread protests spilling into rallies, clashes and even ransacking of public properties.

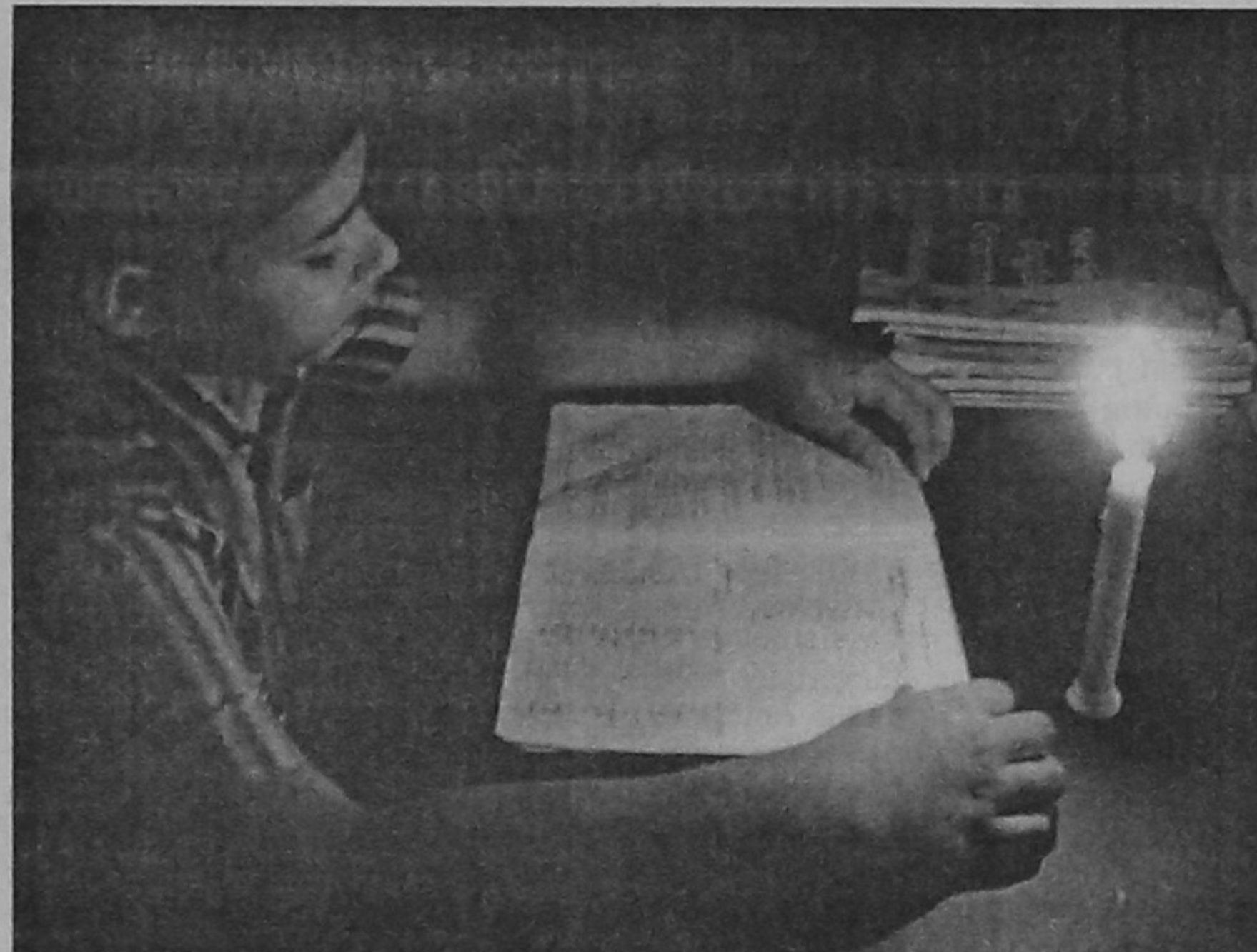
With power demand now reaching 5050 MW that will shoot up to 5400 MW in early June, against a generation capacity of 4184 MW at the maximum despite commissioning of a "spur line" to boost gas pressure in Jalalabad gas field there has been no appreciable increase in

power generation.

The introduction of daylight saving scheme that is being talked about during the last few days might cut down about 250 MW as reports indicated. But that is still a conjecture only. As indications are available, PDB might get only 300 MW from 16 medium and large power plant projects initiated during the last CTG's tenure stipulated to generate 742 MW from early June. All these ominous signals give the impression that peoples' suffering will see no end in the near future.

With load shedding shooting up to 1800 to 2000 MW since May. The proposal placed before the PM by a delegation of knit wear manufacturers as reported in the newspaper for allowing immediate import of 5000 diesel generators to be installed in their factory premises with facilities of providing excess power to the national grid after meeting their needs seems to be a way out to augment the present crisis situation.

As a long term solution, people in the country lend their support to the PM's contention for setting up coal fired power plants in the northern part of Bangladesh because of the availability of coal in that region and a power plant in Bhola as gas has been found there.



Night falls, lights fail.

It is time now to tap the alternative and benign sources of energy. With the experiences of global energy crisis still fresh in public mind, search for renewable sources like all must conduct solar, wind and tidal wave making concerted effort to achieve self-sufficiency in power. This is especially true for Bangladesh where conventional sources of energy are scarce and gas, as the vital natural source so long touted to be a big reserve is drying up.

Without any contradiction, availability of energy in the form of electricity is very important for industrial growth, export viability and irrigation power to attain food self-sufficiency other than meeting the day-to-day needs.

Encouragingly, renewable energy

sources like solar, wind, biogas, hydro, wave and tidal energy, which are inexhaustible and available in abundance throughout the year, can play a vital role in augmenting the energy crisis appreciably. The biggest facility and benefits from tapping such sources arises from the fact that they need no major maintenance, have no pollution hazard, and can be used in isolated areas.

With some pilot project launched in early 2001 by a team of experts from Buet after studying the speed and direction of the wind in coastal areas, there were indications that wind energy can be tapped fruitfully with fabrication of suitable types of wind turbines, especially during May to August when the wind

speed is very high. Surveys made at that time in different coastal regions of Bangladesh showed that Kuakata had the brightest prospect of utilising wind energy with the wind speed at a constant value of 77.6 m/s.

The need for harnessing wind energy in the coastal belts of Bangladesh was greatly felt because these places remained away from the reach of national power grid. These coastal zones and offshore islands inhabited by about 33 million people offer high prospects of alleviating poverty and expanding businesses such as shrimp cultivation, fishing, pisciculture, salt production, tourism etc.

Meanwhile, conventional sources of power, like gas, available in the country continue to dry up with ever increasing exploitation and most shockingly with no further exploration effort for the last ten years. In such a critical situation, we have to look for alternative sources like wind and solar power for generation of electricity so crucially needed to achieve poverty alleviation programs and other goals. Five nations -- Germany, USA, Denmark, Spain and India -- account for 80% of the world's installed wind energy. Wind energy continues to be the fastest growing renewable energy source with worldwide wind power installed capacity reaching 14,000 MW.

In her meeting with the power and energy ministry officials on April 2 last, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina mentioned about the launching of two pilot projects, one in Noakhali for wind energy and another in Narsingdi for solar energy, initiated by the last AI government. Unhappily nobody in the country knows

about the fate of those projects.

People welcome the present AI-led government's move to float tenders for Bibiyana 450 MW power plant, as well as Sirajganj and Meghnaghat power plants with 'dual fuel' as the gas crisis looms up, and import LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) and 15 million pieces of CFL (Compact Fluorescent Light) bulbs and distributing these for free that will save around 200 MW of power.

Any delay in implementing these projects like the previous BNP-Jamaat government will create serious resentment and mass upheaval which no government by applying brute force can contain. But along with these there must be an effort in the home front to generate electricity from indigenous renewable, benign and environment-friendly sources.

If wind or solar power does not fulfil its promise as an alternative energy source by 2020 as stipulated by this government, it will not be a failure of the technology. It will be a failure of vision on the part of the administration and society to make the necessary commitment.

In an effort to make wind energy project successful the government must allow duty-free import of wind turbines. With assistance and expertise borrowed from countries like Denmark and Germany, now leading in this technology, one can reasonably hope that our scientists and engineers would be able to achieve a breakthrough soon enough in tapping wind energy for both grid power and stand alone system.

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Technology in the bedroom



YOUR boyfriend may be a mega hunk now. But how do you know whether he grow up to be a fat, bald guy who can only produce fat, bald children? Now you can tell. All you have to do is get him to spit at you. (Some boyfriends helpfully do this without being asked.)

You then send the spit to an agency in London called SnipScreen. They analyze his DNA and send you a report containing 230 "predispositions". These tell you whether his offspring are likely to have freckles, brown eyes, a thick waist, bald patches, an addiction to watching American Idol and so on. You can then

reject the guy, or, if a fat, bald TV-addicted family is what you most deeply desire, you can marry him on the spot.

It costs just US\$199 to get a blob of spit analyzed. Want to compare two boyfriends? Then it's US\$174 each. The agency offer bulk discounts, dropping the price to US\$150 per sample for 50 boyfriends or more. (I suspect that deal is aimed at Madonna.)

In theory, guys can get their girlfriends' DNA analyzed too, but in practice, males aren't fussy. If the woman has close to the average number of legs and breasts, that'll pretty much do. SnipScreen does not give any information as to how to get the spit sample.

Girls: if you want to be discreet, I suggest you propose some sort of romantic exchange. "Darling, to celebrate our love, I will give you a tress of my hair in a locket, and you give me some saliva to keep in this vial." It's worth a try. Technology is

invading relationships. The people who make those heartbeat watches are expanding into all areas of health monitoring.

Ladies, this is how you are going to have babies in the near future. At the moment of conception, a message will appear on your wrist-monitor:

"Intrusion detected. An outside agent is attempting to upload material into your system. Transfers such as this can contain viruses. If you know and trust the originator of the material being transferred, click here."

It will probably also ask this question: "Always trust material from this source: Yes/No."

The following morning, it will tell you if you are pregnant, asking: "Continue/Retry/Abort."

Your wrist device will then send a message to the father's. Chances are, he will be speechless. Your machine will

say:

"Unable to get a response from remote source. Retry in 60 seconds! Give up/Ignore."

When those strange hormones kick in and you become grumpy and unpredictable, your monitor will send a warning to your husband's:

"Warning: System instability detected. When you can no longer think straight, it will say:

"Warning: Memory in random access mode."

And when the baby is about to be born, it will say:

"Eject? Yes/No."

I don't envy the techies programming these machines. Human relationships are SO complicated. I expect they'll include some sort of cop-out error message for use at difficult times, such as when the couple has an argument in bed:

"We're sorry but we have encountered



a problem and have to close down. You can send an alert to Microsoft which tells us exactly what you were doing at the

time. Send/Don't send."

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