



Jafar and his fellow surfers-ready for the big waves.

My romance with the elegant sport of surfing started many years ago watching such seminal classics as Endless Summer (1966) and countless other surfing movies. Watching surfers on the beaches of Hawaii and California, where I now live, further stoked my interest and love for this magnificent interplay of the human body with the endless waves by way of a simple board. Being a complete klutz at surfing I stuck to wind and body surfing, which I still enjoy a lot at my old age frolicking on the shores of Southern California. A few years ago my friend Reza brought to my attention this quaint surf club on the beaches of Cox's Bazaar. I was curious and checked out their website (surfingbangladesh.com) and Facebook page ([facebook.com/BangladeshLearnToSurf](https://www.facebook.com/BangladeshLearnToSurf)) and was struck by Jafar Alam's story about pioneering surfing in Bangladesh.

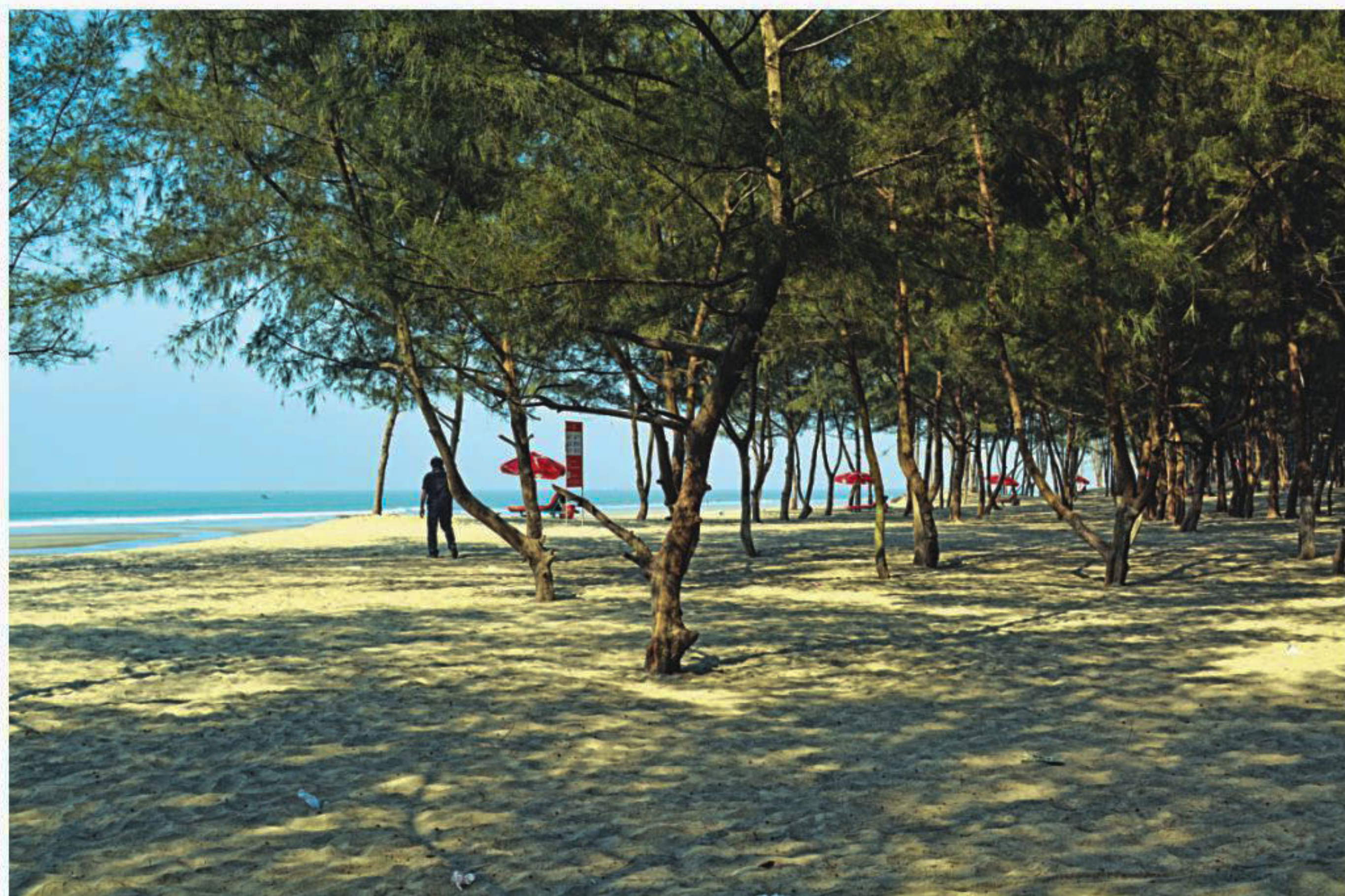
As I was preparing for my latest visit to Bangladesh, on a whim I sent a note to Jafar asking if he needed anything from the US. The man jumped at the opportunity and wrote me that he needed surfboards...I swallowed hard, because I knew they cost a lot of money. However, Jafar put me in touch with the powers that be in the surfing world who contacted me with offers to donate boards and equipment. Kelly Kingston of the Stoke Foundation called from Peru to tell me she arranged for a major board manufacturer in San Diego to give three brand new short boards. Alex Reynold, an active member of the International Surfing Association (ISA) provided two additional surfboards donated by a club in San Diego. Accompanied by my wife and friends I drove down to Carlsbad, California to pick them all up on a borrowed truck from a friend.

A week before I left Los Angeles to fly to Dhaka, Alex informed me that Bangladesh Surf Club became the 91st member of ISA (<http://www.isasurf.org/international-surfing-association-adds-90th-91st-members-drive-global-growth-continues/>). This was a proud moment for Jafar, indeed for all of Bangladesh!

Hauling the four surfboards by air from Los Angeles to Dhaka by way of London and Istanbul proved to be a challenge. Without the goodwill of Turkish Airlines staff and all the folks, both family members and strangers that I encountered along the journey, the task would have been impossible. Carrying the boards from Dhaka to Cox's Bazaar on Novo Air presented its own challenges, especially because few people are aware of what a "saarfboard" is. You can imagine my relief when I saw intact the box with the boards on my arrival at Cox's Bazaar airport.

After landing at the quaint airport-by-the-sea following the short flight from Dhaka the cool breeze welcomed me to what proved to be an extraordinary encounter. Jafar greeted me with a gladiaola and a bear hug, equally as warm as the breeze from the Bay of Bengal. He eyed the box with the boards as if it was his child! After a short ride on the truck that he arranged we arrived at his Bangladesh Surf School, which is housed in Jafar's modest home that he shares with his 92-year-old mother. After spending the day with this inspirational man, I was struck by his dedication to make surfing a permanent fixture on the sea shores of Bangladesh. He told me how he taught surfing to Sheikh Rehana children and how they were impressed with Jafar's devotion to the sport. Soon, the Prime Minister's office called him and he met with high officials in Dhaka, including the PM, who gave him a modest stipend and promised to follow through with more resources. True to her word she dispatched State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak and other officials to visit Jafar's surf school. Jafar is waiting to see what action the honorable minister takes.

Jafar first took up surfing in the 1990's after watching it on television and meeting with surfers from Australia when he was only 14 years old. He struggled with it for three years until one day he had the epiphany to paddle out behind the waves before boarding them. In 2001, he caught the attention of Tom Baur, a visiting US surfer who later became his mentor. Jafar never looked back after that and is a world class surfer today. I witnessed a surfing class he gave his students. As a certified trainer, he starts on the dry beach with a lesson on the basics of keeping the body in agile shape and instills a sense of holistic nature to the exercise by lecturing his students that surfing is more than a sport, it's a highly disciplined endeavor that teaches the foundation of living a fulfilling life with a purpose. As the training moved to the water with the boys riding the waves Jafar explains that it was hard at first for him to teach the young surfers to be patient...not all the waves are suitable for riding, timing is everything.



Patience is indeed a virtue in this sport.

Jafar would like the government to build a surfing training academy with a permanent location, which Jafar has already picked out at a strategic location in Cox's Bazaar. He dreams of a fully functioning surfing academy with a surf shop catering to tourists from all over the world. He has traveled in faraway places like Bali, Hawaii, Australia, California and thinks Cox's Bazaar can be a destination spot for surfers looking for a quiet, un-spoilt beach to hang out. He certainly gets plenty of support and recognition from the surfing world overseas as evidenced by my interaction with the folks he introduced me in the US. As we were walking along a serene section of the beach, Jafar told me that he got a call that morning from an Australian woman, Sandra Helen Robson, who has been kayaking for three years and is now coming through Bangladesh and needed a place to rest. Jafar was happy to oblige.

It is clear that the outside world is very much aware of Jafar and his nearly 20-year struggle to establish surfing as a legitimate sport in Bangladesh. However, he's not sure about Bangladesh itself. He hopes that the people and the government of Bangladesh view surfing like all countries with waves to ride do. As we talked into the wee hours of the night eating the local seafood delicacy, pomfret, I detected a tinge of frustration. I teased him about not having a wife. He suddenly became pensive and narrated a story about losing several girlfriends when their fathers found out what Jafar did for a living. He's convinced he'll probably end up marrying a fellow woman surfer from Australia or the US. We both had a good laugh over that.

If something doesn't happen soon to lift the sport to the next level in Bangladesh, I'm afraid the man will reach a breaking point and may migrate to a country more friendly to his profession. If that happens Bangladesh will lose a valuable home-grown treasure and the country will be worse for it. I believe he needs a high profile promoter and serious resources and partnerships to establish his dream, which I certainly share. I ask that you please contact Jafar if you would like to support his cause and help in any way you can.

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