

# Treat guesthouse as hospitality industry

DTM-2002 seminar urges government

## STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday urged the government to treat guesthouse business as a hospitality industry to promote the fledgling tourism sector in the country.

The seminar mostly attended by hospitality industry people also called on the authorities to come up with tourism-friendly regulations to help grow the sector.

"The government offers hotel business tax incentives and allows it to open bars, but the guesthouse business are yet to get the same facilities", said Sadique Ahsan, President of Bangladesh Guest House Owners' Association (BGHWA), at the seminar titled "Growth of Hospitality Industry in Bangladesh".

The Bangladesh Monitor, a fortnightly travel magazine, in

association with the BGHWA organised the seminar at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on the occasion of Dhaka Travel Mart-2002, the first ever tourism fair in the country.

"The tour operators do not feel safe to arrange lodgings for travellers in guesthouses in fear of police raid and other legal hassles. So, middle-class tourists are forced to check in expensive hotels which dwarf growth of tourism industry", Ahsan said.

"The guesthouses work hand-in-hand with hotels in boosting tourism industry but the government is still hesitant about definition of guesthouses," he continued.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain were present at the seminar as chief and special guests respectively.



PHOTO: STAR

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain visit Emiartes stall at Dhaka Travel Mart-2002 yesterday.

Reacting to the security problems and police harassment at the

guesthouses, the home minister said he will extend all sorts of help to

make sure that the inmates feel secure and homely at the guesthouses.

He said the country should develop tourism infrastructure first to attract both local and foreign tourists and the guesthouse and the rest-houses are synonymous to the development of the industry.

The minister said though the idea of hospitality industry is new in the country, it is becoming popular since it is the lifeblood of tourism.

Energy Minister AKM Mosharraf Hossain said more foreign investors will be coming to the country for business purposes as the government is opening up the market.

"As the accommodation demand will go up with the increased number of foreign investors and tourists, the country needs to build more hotels, guesthouses and other facilities," he said.

He suggested the BGHWA to

talk to the Board of Investment (BOI) regarding its demand that the guesthouse business be treated as an industry.

Gazi Sadeq, former Director of Hotel International Ltd, presented a keynote paper at the seminar.

"Indifferent attitude of the government and shyness of private sector is so acute in the tourism industry that no four-star or five-star hotel has been built in last 20 years in the country," the paper said.

Kazi Wahidul Haq, Chairman of DTM-2002 organising committee, Faridul Haq, President of Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), Shahid Hamid of Pacific Travel Association (PATA-Bangladesh), Shahabuddin Ahmed and Hasan Monsur also spoke on the occasion.

'GDSs help travel agents keep up with tech revolution'

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Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) are helping the travel agents keep up with the technological revolution and make profit from it.

It was observed by Rakesh Bansal, Chief Operating Officer of Amadeus Indian Subcontinent, at a seminar on "Travel Automation in the Context of South Asia" held Friday in the city on the occasion of Dhaka Travel Mart-2002, according to a press release.

He said the travel facilitated by GDSs and travel agents fell by only 0.4 per cent to 78.1 per cent in 1999 from 78.5 per cent in 1998.

New player-telecommunication companies like Telefonica Terra Networks in Spain, mobile telephone (GSM) operators like Orange and Essar in India, ERP providers like SAP and Oracle, equipment providers like Ericsson, Nokia and Motorola, media companies like L'Espresso, Bertelsmann -- are in the distribution fray but GDSs and travel agents have not been bypassed, Rakesh observed.

GDSs have developed and marketed software products and services used by the distribution chains. Amadeus' distribution platform is now being used by a total of 115 airlines including British Airways and Qantas, said Rakesh.

Amadeus meets large global corporations' needs through its partnership with SAP, the world leader in ERP software, and has extra-net solution for medium and small corporations. The GDS is also in mobile commerce with the customers using WAP phones.

Amadeus is in the mobile commerce domain too. Small Scandinavian carriers are offering booking and other flight information only on mobile telephones. It is also available in India and now going to start in Bangladesh. It can be done from one's WAP-compatible mobile phone, the Amadeus India COO said, pointing to a travel agent serving the corporate sector in Bangladesh.



PHOTO: STAR

A huge gorilla-shaped balloon installed at Sheraton Hotel by Best Western La Vinci Hotel on the occasion of Dhaka Travel Mart-2002 attracts visitors, especially young ones, yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

A partial view of Grand Azad Hotel stall at Dhaka Travel Mart-2002 yesterday.

visitors. The company provides high-class boat and guide services.

"Mainly staff of the foreign mis-

sions in Dhaka are our clients. We arrange river cruises from Ashulia to Sadarghat and Dhaka to Sundarbans," said an executive of Contic. The company operating for the last four year has around 50 employees.

The typical wooden boat has six cabins, four washrooms and also a kitchen and usually takes three to four days for a Dhaka-Sundarbans-Dhaka trip. Contic charges US\$48 for a trip of Ashulia-Sadarghat-Ashulia. The charge covers food and transport to pick up from home with return facility.

The company has also a seaplane. Its charge ranges between \$240 and \$350 per person. Contic charges \$25 per day for its tour guide. "We are very much a specialised service provider and our clients are satisfied with our ser-

vices," the official went on. The company is now planning to introduce 18 speedboats to operate in Cox's Bazar.

Another company Amadeus is engaged in providing computerised reservation system (CRS) of airlines. Around 108 airlines are using Amadeus CRS and it has access to 500 airlines.

With a five-day basic training, a person himself can arrange his own air ticket of any airline. There are about 400 travel agents in Dhaka and 170 firms are using Amadeus CRS. It has also access to around 54,000 hotels through which a person can complete hotel booking.

Interacting with the participating companies, the visitors at the fair are getting firsthand information not only about the services but also the latest state-of-the-art technology

now being used in the tourism industry.

Some participants suggested that the first thing government do to attract foreign tourists is to improve the law and order situation. "Even being a Bangladeshi nation, I do not feel secured to visit the Cox's Bazar beach. It has become a risky place now. How can we expect foreigners would come to visit the spot?" an official of a participating company posed the question.

"Against all odds, some tour operators have gained reputation for the country. They provide top class services to their clients and are attracting foreign tourists, who are still interested to see different attractive places in the country," he went on.

Around 69 firms representing airlines, hotels, tour and air express

service providers are participating in the first-ever international tourism fair in the country. Today is the

concluding day of the three-day fair, which is being held at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

## STOCK



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A visitor makes enquires at Hertz and IPSSL stall at Dhaka Travel Mart-2002 yesterday.