

Tourism: Untapped potential

The tragedy in Mumbai

Saarc must stand as one against terror

WE strongly condemn the barbaric terror attacks which have once more claimed lives in Mumbai and left scores of others injured. Our prayers go out to the families of the dead and to those who have been wounded. In their hour of grief, we as well as the broad mass of Bangladesh's citizens stand with the people and government of India as they struggle to defeat the forces of terrorism.

There can be no compromise with terrorism because, irrespective of caste, creed, faith or nationality, terrorism militates against the fundamental values which keep society throbbing and alive in the pursuit of all that is good and noble. What has happened in Mumbai less than three years after the mayhem of 2008 is the mindless work of a small minority seeking to achieve its nefarious purposes by means foul and despicable. We hold that the majority of people everywhere believe in human dignity and in the right of all to share the opportunities which life has on offer. And because they do, this new act of terrorism in Mumbai is repugnant to people not just in India but across the globe as a whole.

The attacks in Mumbai are a wake-up call for us all in Bangladesh. That we should not be suffering from any complacency where keeping tabs on terror is concerned is the message which once more comes to us loud and clear. We appreciate the state of alert the Bangladesh government has displayed in these past two years and a half. A state of constant vigil, now in place, must be raised to levels even higher for us to stay many steps ahead of these merchants of fear.

Almost all Saarc countries have been severe victims of terror as such, they should be united in their fight against it. They must coordinate more intensely to be effective against terror. Mere lip service to handling terrorism is pointless unless concrete, region-wide sharing of intelligence and focused, coordinated actions are in place. One must not forget that terrorism knows no national boundaries, which is why combating it on a collective scale is today a dire necessity.

Stabilising prices for Ramadan

Market players need to coordinate

CONSULTATIONS have been taking place between the government and the trade and chamber bodies on one level, and between the wholesalers and the business leaders on another. The missing link, however, seems to be the retailers' associations. They need be brought in the loop because they are an important part of the market equations.

The interface between leaders of the business community and the wholesalers in the capital on Monday at the initiative of the Dhaka Chamber President Asif Ibrahim and attended by FBCCI President AK Azad and Commerce Minister Faruk Khan reviewed the stock positions of essential commodities. The FBCCI president argued that stocks of sugar and edible oil being sufficient, there is no reason for price hike, especially of those two items.

The wholesale traders differed from the FBCCI chief. They contended that government sector sugar industries under-producing and five out of six refining factories having been closed due to gas crisis; supply of sugar is irregular. That's why the high price of sugar. They also pointed out that edible oil are not sufficiently available to meet demands. The differing perceptions of stock and supply positions within the business community are cause for worries.

The wholesalers voiced their concerns about hartal and banks charging interest at a notch higher than the Bangladesh Bank-stipulated 12 percent on import of food items including spices. As for hartal, the political parties should refrain from calling it to chime in with the trader and consumer concerns.

President of the Bangladesh Supermarket Owners Association Niaz Rahim, for his part, has made a commitment not to charge different prices for meat, milk, gram, lentil, sugar, and date across their network. His assurance may have a positive vive with the upper end of the society who are their clientele. But what of the multitudes of consumers who depend on ordinary marketing network for their provisions? It is there that the price and quality control efforts will have to be expended to ease the plight of

G. M. QUADER

HUMAN beings are instinctively curious. From time immemorial people moved from one place to another to know the unknown, see the unseen, discover the undiscovered and go into ecstasies about the newness. With the advent of civilization and technological advancement, the world has become smaller. With the rise of income level, people are being liberated from the clutches of poverty gradually. People of the global village can afford to move easily from one corner to another.

This is why the number of tourist arriving is always rising. In 2010, about \$852 billion business has been generated at a high growth rate of 7%, which was 5% in the previous year. In the coming days, it is predicted to witness an even higher growth rate. With the passage of time more and more countries across the world are showing increased interest in tourism, investing bigger amounts and also reaping higher benefits.

In the context of the global scenario, only 1% of global tourism transactions are generated in the Saarc region, where India alone seized almost half of it. 1% of the total business means \$10 billion, where Bangladesh earned \$78.3 million in the year 2010, which is below 0.01%. Several countries of this region earn much more every year.

It is not at all difficult for Bangladesh to achieve \$1 billion. We need to ensure that there would be one million tourists arriving per year, and provide facilities so that each tourist spends around \$1,000. This target is not too ambitious considering the varieties Bangladesh can offer.

It is good news for Bangladesh that tourists who usually visit the destinations of developed world are now looking for new and unexplored destinations. Saarc countries and surrounding regions, which are less familiar to the world, are getting attention now.

Since the international communities are showing interest, the countries of this region have become eager to foster the tourism industry. Nepal and Sri Lanka, two of Saarc member countries, have declared separately 2011 as Tourism Year in their nations.

South Korea also declared 2011 as Tourism Year. Maldives, Bhutan, India have already started huge promotional and development work in tourism. Besides, countries like Iran, Turkey, Kazakhstan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand etc. and the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar,

Kuwait etc, are spending billions of dollars for the development of tourism and earning benefits out of this industry.

There is expectation among many in Bangladesh that we should keep pace with other countries in developing the tourism sector. The present government initiated some administrative measures.

An inter-ministerial coordination committee, headed by the secretary tourism, was formed. Besides, an advisory committee headed by the minister of tourism, cabinet committee for tourism headed by the finance minister and the national tourism council, the apex committee for tourism headed by the honorable prime minister, have been formed with the aim to coordinate the efforts of all ministers including stakeholders.

A tourism cell has been established in each deputy commissioner's office with the objective to identify tourist attractions, maintain tourist spots, build infrastructure and ensure overall quality management.

From the experience of countries which has seen considerable growth in tourism, it is found that tourism development is not the job of a single ministry alone. It is a coordinated effort of all the ministries.

Besides, the cell is responsible in taking necessary measures in providing guide services, transportation and ensuring safety and security to the tourists. The expenditures for these purposes will be earned from the visitors. The excess expenditure, if necessary, especially for development work, is to be borne by the district council funds.

Ministry of local government, rural development and cooperatives will manage to get the allocation from the national budget as per the demand submitted by the district councils. This programme could not be made effective in reality due to a lack of awareness among the concerned officials and stakeholders.

The ministry of tourism is preparing multi-participatory tourism development projects jointly with other ministries like local government, forest and environment, cultural, shipping, etc. Proper allocation of fund is necessary for implementing them.

The survey of the vast areas of Cox's Bazaar up to Teknaf and St. Martins Island and Kuakata has been conducted, and the preparation of two separate master plans is now in the final stage. A Cox's Bazaar development

authority, under ministry of housing and settlement, is being created for implementing the development work of Cox's Bazaar.

Authorisation committees have been formed to oversee and guide all development activities in the Cox's Bazaar area and Kuakata till specific development authorities are formed. It can be expected that tourist facilities will flourish in accordance with the master plans from now on.

In addition, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) has been building some facilities in different places of the country as and when needed, subject to the availability of fund. The website of BPC (tourismbangladesh.gov.bd) has also been modernised.

The present government has made a pragmatic tourism policy. A new law has been enacted for the preservation of the tourist attractions of the country and also for establishing exclusive tourist zones. A new national tourism organisation, e.g. Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) has been created.

BTB has been constituted with representatives of related ministries and stakeholders from the private sector. This has allowed a closer interaction between governmental agencies and private sectors for an overall development of this sector. A web portal (visitbangladesh.gov.bd) is being designed to provide all vital information on the tourism sector. We also declared the year 2011 as the Tourism Year for Bangladesh.

In spite of all this, the development of international tourism in Bangladesh is not satisfactory. The entire government needs to be involved under the leadership of the head of the government.

It is also clear that the endeavour of the government is not enough for the maximum exploitation of the tourism potential. Every stakeholder in business, society and opposition political parties need to be involved too.

In fact, development of tourism is not possible until and unless a social movement, involving the entire nation, can be launched to support it. This is exactly what has happened and is happening in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, India etc.

Countries that have made remark-

able achievement in tourism have witnessed direct involvement and/or patronisation of the head of the government. In addition, tourism has been put on top of the priority list of the government. We in Bangladesh lacked in both.

The reason for this is a lack of national confidence in tourism development potentials and the potential benefits from this sector. As such, it is felt that a practical demonstration has become essential to show the potential and the benefit tourism sector can bring.

We believe that Bangladesh has immense prospect in the tourism sector with its natural beauty, historical and archaeological attractions, architectural structures, local culture and lifestyle, colourful indigenous entities and different festivals. Apart from these, the most enticing proposition of Bangladesh for the tourists is the hardworking, resilient, ever-smiling and hospitable people of the country.

There is no denying that both the public and private sectors have developed different tourist facilities and skilled human resources.

As regards enhancement of tourism facilities, we feel we have enough for the present or even to some extent to meet future demands. New facilities are coming up with the increase of demand. If the demand starts growing fast so will the facilities.

Considering the situation, it is believed that if we can project our country to the international community, we will be able to attract quite a good number of tourists who seem eager to find new destinations.

Projecting Bangladesh in the international electronic and print media is necessary to catch more attention. Moreover, different events in our foreign missions can be done highlighting tourism. Participation in different tourism fairs, arrangement of familiarisation tours, and distribution of printed promotional materials are also crucial.

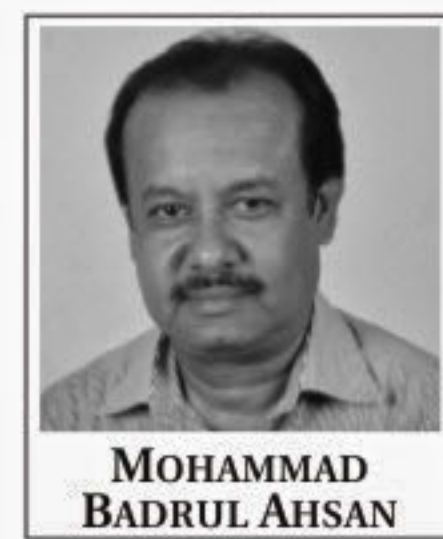
It is felt that "on arrival visa" should be allowed for the tourists from Saarc countries unilaterally. It may also be considered for other countries from where we anticipate large number of visitors.

Tourism can create a huge employment opportunity and can contribute substantially to the economy. Tourism, thus, can play a vital role in poverty alleviation. The biggest barrier to development of tourism is the lack of trust and the main challenge is to create confidence.

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CROSS TALK

The absurdity of a rape



THIS civilization needs major repairs because it has been showing cracks in critical places. A lewd schoolteacher

forced himself on his student and then used his mobile phone to take her pictures. He raped her again a few days later, warning her not to tell anyone because the smutty images were still in his possession. Didn't I say something is wrong with this civilization? A man of learning was disposed to behave like the monster of the monsters.

What this man did was not out of this world. It happens all the time in the jungles around us. The mighty predate on the meek, tigers upon deers, snakes upon frogs and frogs upon flies. But we thought we had devised something special for the human race, a civilized world where people would act in a rational manner. We even thought this rationality was going to get better. Education would improve on it like polish brings shine to metal.

But this rape took place in a place of learning. The student had gone there to learn, and surely the lesson of that particular day is going to stay with her for life. We don't know how this stu-

dent is going to tackle her pain going forward. We don't know what she will think next time she has to sit in a classroom looking at another teacher. She might have to struggle for the rest of her life between the horror of learning and the learning of horror.

The heartbreaking tragedy exemplifies a failure. This civilization belongs not to the victim but to the victimiser since possession is half of the law regardless of how the thing came into possession.

This girl carried the burden of her ordeal all by herself, not daring to disclose it to her family. She thought becoming a victim was her very own fault.

US author Freda Adler had pointed out that absurdity in 1955. "Rape is the only crime in which the victim becomes the accused," she wrote. And this is one of the many flaws of this modern civilization that never got rectified. All our knowledge and inventions still fail to explain why a victim should be tormented by the guilt of the wrong done to her by others.

And it was for this reason that this girl got raped for a second time. She

said nothing after the first time and went back to that coaching centre to suffer that nightmare once again. Instead she should have gone back with the police and her family members to confront that lout. That rotten man should have been in jail from day one.

It wasn't so much her fault if that isn't how it has happened. The blame goes to our morbid civilization and its double standards, since nobody can

centre a layer within a layer. It tells us it's wrong to victimise another person, and that it's also wrong to be victimised. It tells us to scream when it hurts, and then heaves on inhibitions to muffle the voice.

Otherwise, why should a young girl have to hesitate to talk after a ruthless man hurt her against her will? Why should it be her burden to carry, while a curse-hounded beast, a crude lech dares to keep visual records of his despicable deed? Why should the victim be ashamed of rape anymore than the rapist if not for this civilization that treats women like a package, non-refundable if opened?

For the molested girl as well as the rest of us, the question isn't why the teacher did such a horrible thing to his student. The question rather is why the student should be smitten by its shame. Did she have to be ashamed were she attacked by a rabid dog? Or, were she bitten by a venomous snake?

Truth is that we humans have a lot to be ashamed of. Shame itself is one of those things, a clever contrivance invented by the strong amongst us to turn their guilt into a psychosis for the weak. They steal from others; they cheat and lie; and they do many other rotten things. They have got politics to blame it on others. They have got economics to blame it on numbers, philosophy to blame it on this life, psychology to blame it on behavior, and religion to blame it on life after death.

Except that this civilization can do little to compel the strong to confront themselves. It would have been unacceptable if the student were to miss the payment of a month's tuition. But the teacher saw nothing wrong with plundering the most precious jewel of his young student. The school saw nothing wrong with it either, as it delayed action against that teacher. This civilization is still uncivilized. It's good at adding insult to injury.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 15

1149 The reconstructed Church of the Holy Sepulchre is consecrated in Jerusalem.

1799 The Rosetta Stone is found in the Egyptian village of Rosetta by French Captain Pierre-François Bouchard during Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign.

1955 Eighteen Nobel laureates sign the Mainau Declaration against nuclear weapons, later co-signed by thirty-four others.

1966 Euston staff 'colour bar' ended. A West Indian refused a job at Euston Station will now be employed there after managers overturn a ban on black workers.

1995 Serbs force Muslims out of Srebrenica. Thousands of Muslim refugees flee the captured "safe area" of Srebrenica - forced out by the Bosnian Serbs.