

New tourism law to ensure eco compliance

SAYEDA AKTER

THE government is set to form a new law for the tourism sector to strictly monitor the registration process of tourism services providers and to offer high quality services.

The proposed law, likely to be named as Tourism Registration and Control Act 2012, will ensure that the service providers are registered properly with the relevant authority and are complying with the government's environment protection directives.

"The government wants to reorganise the registration process to make it easy for the service providers," said Akhtaruzzaman Khan Kabir, chief executive officer of Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB).

In July, the civil aviation and tourism ministry formed a high-power committee consisting of all stakeholders, including government officials, owners and operators of hotels, motels, resorts, restaurants, tourist coaches and beverage sellers.

The committee held a meeting early this month, and asked its stakeholders to add proposals on their respective sectors, as the body is now working to prepare a draft of the law, said the BTB chief.

"We will hold few more meetings of this kind, and hope to finalise the framework by the yearend."

"The law will also bring all the infrastructures that were built without taking prior permissions under its jurisdiction." He said the projects violating the environment protection directives will lose their approval.



ANURUP KANTI DAS

Holidaymakers flock to Cox's Bazar sea beach in large numbers during the Eid-ul-Fitr vacation recently. The government plans to launch a new law to ensure better tourism services in such places.

Many of the hundreds of hotels, motels, resorts and restaurants that were built in recent years did not take prior permissions, said Kabir.

"We often get complaints about low standards of services, but due to a lack of a unified law we cannot take actions against them."

Kabir said genuine and ethical entrepreneurs do not have to worry about any harassments and difficulties. The new law will combine several scattered laws, and reduce the complexities of

establishing a new service in the sector, he said.

In 2011, the travel and tourism sector accounted for Tk 18,250 crore or 2.2 percent of Bangladesh's gross domestic product, according to a report published by the World Travel and Tourism Council.

The amount is expected to rise by 7.3 percent to Tk 19,590 crore in 2012 and by 6.1 percent to Tk 35,370 crore by 2022, according to the London-based institute.

The sector created 13.29 lakh jobs directly in 2011 or 1.9 percent of the country's total employment. It will generate another 13.77 lakh jobs this year and 18.4 lakh jobs by 2022, according to the report.

The government formed the National Tourism Policy of Bangladesh in 1992, which was amended and transformed into the National Tourism Policy 2010.

Kabir said the new law will also help increase the revenue further, as it would ensure improved services.

BB profits up 105pc

Bangladesh Bank counts loss in foreign currency revaluation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

BANGLADESH Bank's net profits, buoyed by increased government borrowing and repo operations, shot up 105 percent to Tk 3,858 crore in fiscal 2011-12.

The financial results were disclosed after a board meeting that approved the annual accounts for the fiscal year, AFM Asaduzzaman, general manager of Bangladesh Bank (BB), said yesterday.

The amount payable to government coffers stood at Tk 3,481 crore, up 109 percent from the previous year's Tk 1,664 crore.

Operating profits, at Tk 7,031.74 crore, were 20.48 percent lower than last fiscal year's Tk 8,842.59 crore.

"Operating profits have gone down due to a significant loss in foreign currency revaluation," a senior BB official told The Daily Star.

Income from foreign currency revaluation in fiscal 2011-12 was Tk 3,173 crore in fiscal 2011-12, when it stood at Tk 6,957 crore in the previous year.

Income from domestic sources jumped to 1,983 crore from Tk 441 crore a year ago. The growth rate was over 122 percent, thanks to higher government borrowings.

The central bank earned Tk 1,206 crore by lending to the government, up by nearly 148 percent from previous year's Tk 299 crore.

Income from foreign sources rose by over 13 percent from Tk 964 crore to Tk 1,091 crore, mainly due to higher interest rate.

The interest income from investment in local banks and the government is referred to as a domestic source, while the interest earned from investments of foreign currency reserves in commercial and central banks abroad is termed as earnings from foreign sources.

Apple's patent victory is a victory for competition

JOHN C ABELL

APPL'S resounding patent victory over Samsung in a California courtroom last Friday is a blow to the competition, which now won't be able copy Apple's technology. But it is a win for competition. It will force everyone to think harder about turning the unimaginable into the normal.

And that's what technology innovation is all about.

I am all for intellectual property (it's how writers make a living) and no particular fan of software patents, which can be vague and overly broad. It's a very tangled area of IP that in the modern-day tech industry has been a life-support system (think Kodak) and a means of protecting oneself against patent trolls (like that guy who tried to sue the World Wide Web). Patent troves, in the astute description of technologist Andy Baio, have also been weaponised in perverted campaigns to stifle innovation.

Apple and Samsung are duking it out all over the world -- some 50 lawsuits in about 10 countries, by one reckoning -- in a sort of forever war. Samsung got a favorable ruling just days before in a South Korean court. But the marquee case was the one in San Jose, California, where a jury found that Samsung had violated six of the seven patents Apple sought to defend -- three software and three design -- and awarded the company \$1.05 billion.

The conventional wisdom is that a victory like this for a company like Apple is bad for consumers because it gives a virtual monopoly even more marketplace power.

Dan Gimor, director of the Knight Centre for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication -- and nobody's fool -- presents this case as clearly as I have seen:

...e're likely to see a ban on many mobile devices from Samsung and other manufacturers in the wake of this case, as an emboldened Apple tries to create an unprecedented monopoly. If so, the ultimate loser will be competition in the technology marketplace, with even more power accruing to a company that already has too much.

Leave aside the California jury's wisdom or the possibility the outcome will be reversed on appeal. Leave aside how you feel about the iPhone. Leave aside how you feel about Apple, whose Microsoft-like



AFP

An employee shows an Apple's iPhone 4s (L) and a Samsung's Galaxy S3 (R) at a mobile phone shop in Seoul.

imperiousness was more charming when it was a minor underdog and not bigger than Microsoft. Leave aside how much Apple's deep hatred of Google related to Android, the market-leading mobile operating system that powers Samsung and many other phones, may be driving this blood feud.

We tech consumers are interested in price, and in the near term, tablets and smartphones could be more expensive because of license fees and the huge cost of patent litigation added to the cost of the electronics we buy. And there may also be less choice for a while.

But we have a deeper vested interest in the levelling power that comes from true competition, even if it costs a little more to get there. It's not about rewarding the originator of an idea. It's about challenging everyone else to come up with a better one. We should be for things that punish techno-

logical complacency and that protect conditions for innovation, not take a rooting interest in which companies are winning and which are losing (Pandodaily's Farhad Manjoo makes a great case that copying paid off handsomely for Samsung -- revenue of about \$25 million from the infringing handsets, versus a cost of litigation of about \$3 billion).

Extending the status quo -- as in making more phones like iPhones -- may have made things cheaper, but it wasn't going to inspire innovation or cultivate the Next Great Thing. It's the difference between competing in the marketplace and competing in the marketplace of ideas: There's a narrow advantage to us in the former and an incalculable one in the latter.

Take a look at one of the patents Apple successfully defended. Apple's strict enforcement of "bounce-back scroll" --

which alerts you to the "bottom" of a "page" by snapping it back to fill the screen -- would mean that Android phones can't have it. Owners of anything but an iPhone would be denied a very obvious and very handy feature -- without feedback, you might just think that the page has stopped loading, which happens quite a lot. This sort of animation adds character and makes a smartphone more intuitive. It's not a killer app but, like power steering, maybe should be on every car once it's invented.

It came into being because some smart person or team thought it up to address a user interface shortcoming that nobody else had given much attention to, or that hadn't been solved as well. Apple took a chance on it (and dozens of other big and little original ideas) and struck gold with the iPhone

and its operating system.

Whether or not you believe Apple should even be in a position to own it is irrelevant. By borrowing so heavily, Apple's competitors aren't on the road to inventing anything that could change everything. They aren't competing. They're just offering modestly differentiated alternatives of an idea of a smartphone that has already caught on.

Competitors need to identify flaws the other guy hasn't and boldly pursue solutions. Apple does this, not so much by inventing but by reimagining: There were music players before the iPod, desktop computers before the iMac, smartphones before the iPhone, tablets before the iPad. But they all had missing ingredients Apple didn't pluck off someone else's shelf.

So powerful is Apple's reputation for radically improving on things that have been tried that we are pining to see what its vision for a TV set might be (in an era when the best TV set you have is your smartphone or tablet), and ponder how it would have designed a car.

Where is Apple's competition?

The irony is that Samsung has already come up with a suitable alternative to bounce-back scroll, the New York Times reports: a blue glow when you reach the bottom of a page. Sounds cool. Maybe even cooler.

Even more ironic: Patents complicate progress but are more like annoying speed bumps than insurmountable walls. "In this industry, patents are not a clean weapon to stop others," Silicon Valley consultant and former IBM IP Strategy VP Kevin G. Rivette told the Times. "The technology, like water, will find its way around impediments."

Sterne Agee analyst Shaw Wu also argues as much. In telling Reuters that the entire Android universe may now have to consider "doing something different", Wu is postulating that there always is something different to do.

What's good for a competitor isn't necessarily what's good for competition. Necessity, the old saying goes, is the mother of invention. Competition slows when competitors sample, when they rely too heavily on the breakthroughs of others.

It's no accident that every smartphone now looks a lot like the iPhone (and none did before the iPhone). But it is a crying shame. Invent something, already.

John C Abell is a columnist for Reuters