

Bangladesh must bank on cultural diversity to promote tourism

Says the secretary-general of World Tourism Organisation

TALEB RIFAI, secretary-general of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, came to Dhaka to attend the two-day International Conference on Developing Sustainable and Inclusive Buddhist Heritage in South Asia's Buddhist Heartland.

During his three-day stay in Bangladesh, Rifai also visited the world's largest mangrove forest Sundarbans and the world's longest unbroken sea beach in Cox's Bazar.

Rifai, a Jordanian, is serving as the UNWTO secretary-general for the second four-year term, since January 2014. He served the organisation for the first term in 2010. He also served International Labour Organisation as assistant director-general.

A graduate of architectural engineering, Rifai had also served the Jordanian government as a minister in different capacities, including tourism and antiquities, information, and planning and international cooperation.

In an interview with Sohel Parvez of The Daily Star (TDS) on October 29, he shared his opinion on Bangladesh's tourism industry.

TDS. This is your first visit to Bangladesh. What's your impression of the country and what prospects for tourism do you see here?

Rifai: I am very impressed with what I have seen here, particularly as I did not know about or expect most of what I saw. That is always very positive, especially for someone like me, who has visited so many places all over the world. This means there must be something really inter-



Taleb Rifai

esting here, and that needs to be displayed and promoted.

Tourism is about showing the best of a country, celebrating what it has; and what I see in Bangladesh is particularly the rich diversity of culture, which is very remarkable and unique. Not only diversity, there is pride in that diversity in celebrating and exposing it. This is something that I really wish the world would see.

TDS. What steps can Bangladesh take to attract tourists from around the world?

Rifai: I think every country in the world should bank on the strength of its people and its

unique culture or cultures. Landscape and natural settings are important of course. And every country in the world can show off its mountains, its rivers, its beaches. What is unique about Bangladesh is its culture and its people. That is what Bangladesh should bank on, because that is unique.

More importantly, the world should know that Bangladesh has Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists; it is a mix of all those people. It is the accumulation of history of centuries of all these. It has resulted in modern-day gallery of men and women. This is something that the world does

not know yet or at least does not have a clear idea about.

TDS. Why is Bangladesh yet to attract a large number of foreign tourists?

Rifai: Tourism is not an easy industry to come to terms with. Many people do not understand the value and potential of tourism. It is an under-utilised and under-recognised sector. People think it is just about having fun. Of course, that is a part. But it is about creating jobs, building an image, strengthening a brand, lifting people out of poverty. It is about boosting trade and building infrastructure. This is what tourism is all about.

At this stage, I felt there is a new spirit, a new breath of belief and the government wants to do something with tourism in Bangladesh. I believe tourism is probably one of the key areas of progress of this country.

TDS. What are your key suggestions for the government and people involved in the tourism sector?

Rifai: One -- have a clear strategy supported by the highest level of political hierarchy. Tourism is a very horizontal sector. It cannot be led only by the ministry of tourism. It has to be led by the highest level of authority, by the prime minister and the president.

Two -- start promoting the best of what you have. The world needs to know more about it. Create as much noise as you can, create as much attention as you can and invite as many people as you can.

Three -- focus on domestic tourism as well, and build the culture of your own people appreciating their own country. The countries that are appreciated by their own people are appreciated by visitors; the countries that are loved by their own people are loved by visitors. The countries that are safe for their people are safe for visitors.

So you must start with domestic tourism, build the infrastructure, build the culture for that and then everything will follow.

TDS. What's your take on tourism prospects in Bangladesh?

Rifai: I smell a success story already in the making in Bangladesh.

Japan, US lead economic rule-making under TPP: Japan PM

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday hailed a huge Pacific Rim free-trade deal, saying it showcased a bid by Japan and the United States to set rules for the global economy.

His comments come a day after the long-secret text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was made public.

The massive document, posted online by several governments, offered the first detailed look at the world's biggest free trade area, which aims to break down barriers to commerce and investment between a dozen countries comprising about 40 percent of the global economy.

The US and Japan are the proposed bloc's two biggest economies.

"Rules should not be something that are imposed on you -- you make them," Abe told an economic forum in Tokyo. "The TPP is the structure where Japan and the US can lead in economic rule-making."

Abe also said he would "enthusiastically welcome" South Korea and Indonesia, which have signalled interest in joining, into the zone, so long as they "accept the rules" that Tokyo helped write.

The pact, agreed a month ago, aims to break down trade and investment barriers among participating nations Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam.

The deal now awaits legislative approvals in each one of the dozen members -- a potentially contentious and lengthy process.

Abe and many Japanese experts have long supported the TPP, which should give greater foreign market access for "Japan Inc."

But politically connected farm lobbies and some consumer groups have passionately opposed the zone, fearing it would destroy Japan's agriculture by opening a floodgate for cheap foreign imports and altering Japan's rules for consumer protection.

Abe stressed that the TPP will bring "transparent and fair rules" of trade among the participating economies. "The TPP truly constitutes a grand plan for the long-term future of our nation," he said.

On the domestic front, Abe suggested that he might compile an extra budget "if necessary" to fund social and economic programmes to be drafted by the end of this month. Abe also touched on what he described as "increasing concerns" over China's economic slowdown.

"I would like the Chinese government to steadily implement structural reforms while ensuring transparency," Abe said of Japan's giant neighbour and world's second-largest economy.

China to go after online retail sales in fight against fakes

REUTERS, Shanghai

China plans to crack down on the sale of fake goods online by using cloud computing, big data and tighter rules on user identity in its latest moves to quash counterfeiting.

China has been trying to reign in its counterfeiters, who have copied everything from Apple iPhones to Louis Vuitton handbags, since it joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and was required to adhere to global standards on intellectual property rights.

The country plans to eradicate intellectual property rights infringement on the internet within 3 years, it said in a posting

by China's cabinet on its official website on Saturday. China will promote the use of a "real-name system" on the internet and electronic tags to make it easier to track goods and the identities of offenders, the statement said.

Inter-regional law enforcement will also be improved, it said, with a focus on sharing information amongst Beijing, Tianjin and the Yangtze River Delta, as well as other regions. In a rare move, China singled out Walt Disney Co for special trademark protection on Thursday.

More than 40 percent of goods sold online in China last year were either counterfeits or of bad quality, the official Xinhua news agency reported earlier this week.



REUTERS/FILE

A fake Apple iPhone 6s, left, which sells at RMB 580 (\$91), is seen beside a fake iPhone 6 Plus, which sells at RMB 630 (\$99), in China -- both running on the Android operating system with iOS look-alike interfaces.

InterContinental Hotels denies exploring sale or merger

REUTERS

InterContinental Hotels Group Plc, one of the world's largest hoteliers, said it was not exploring a sale or merger, following a media report that the company was looking at its strategic options.

"Following recent market speculation, the board of directors of IHG states that it is not considering a potential sale or merger of the company," IHG said in a statement on Friday.

Bloomberg reported earlier that IHG was in discussions with its financial advisers over whether to put itself up for sale or combine with a competitor as the sector consolidates.

London-listed Shares in IHG climbed 5 percent to a four-month high of 2,741 pence, valuing the company at about 6.2 billion pounds. The stock was the top riser on Britain's FTSE 100 index.

IHG, which runs more than 4,900 hotels under brands such as Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn and InterContinental, said last month it was confident in its outlook after reporting higher than expected growth in its third quarter.

BlackBerry is hoping its sleek design and touch-sensitive keys that allows users to swipe, scroll and set up shortcuts will woo former loyalists back to using the Priv.

Initial reviews of the device were mixed, with many lauding its security offerings, long battery life, camera, dual-keyboard design and other features, but panning the Priv's high price tag - \$699 without a contract in the United States and C\$899 without a contract in Canada.

Still, if the Priv does well, analysts note the device could be a game changer for the Waterloo, Ontario-based company.

US companies drawn to Cuba, unsure if profits will follow



REUTERS

Cuban visitors walk inside the US pavilion during the Havana International Fair on Thursday.

REUTERS, Havana

ABOUT 50 American businesses came to Havana this week for a trade expo, many of them intrigued but still unclear how to make money in a Communist-ruled country of 11 million people who have little purchasing power.

With detente raising hopes that full commercial ties could be restored, US companies are being drawn to Cuba. But it is a market whose attraction defies convention, given that foreign businesses complain about the island's bizarre dual-currency system, rigid labour market and opaque legal guarantees.

Some US companies are attracted to the forbidden fruit - the island has been largely off bounds to US business for more than five decades. Others say they can fill a need, or lament that the United States is ceding a neighbouring market to the rest of the world.

One US company that is in line to open the first American factory in Cuba in more than half a century is interested in the island only because its co-founder was born here.

Alabama-based Cleber LLC says it has been approved by the Cuban government to assemble tractors at

the special development zone surrounding the port of Mariel. But because of the continuing US trade embargo, Cleber would need special US permission to open shop.

"We can open businesses anywhere in the world. Cuba is special on a personal basis," said Saul Berenthal, a Cuban-American who left the island in 1960, the year after Fidel Castro's rebels came to power.

US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro agreed last December to end Cold War-era animosity and restore diplomatic relations, but the embargo remains in place as only the US Congress can lift it.

Obama has permitted some commerce, such as telecommunications, and allowed US companies to sell to Cuba's nascent private sector, adding to existing limited business.

The newcomers can look at the experience of privately held shipping company Crowley Maritime Corporation, which has been making losses or breaking even in Cuba for 14 years.

Jacksonville, Florida-based Crowley entered Cuba in 2001, after Washington started allowing food sales to Cuba, largely because Jay Brickman fell in love with Cuba in

1978, when his boss Thomas Crowley first sent him to Cuba to investigate business opportunities.

Brickman, now vice president of government services for Crowley, said he expects profits soon under the market-friendly changes from the US and Cuban governments.

"Is it worth it, only in a business sense? No," Brickman said from the annual Havana International Fair. His reward has been many friendships and a book he authored, he said.

As Crowley and European, Canadian and Latin American investors can attest, uncertainties hang over the business climate.

"How guaranteed is your investment? Are you sure that you can make profits? Are you sure that there will be no confiscation of your industry?" Brickman said.

There are US companies with a firm business plan. Sprint Corp signed an agreement with Cuba's state telecoms monopoly Etecsa on Sept. 25 and added an agreement on roaming services on Monday.

Others are global giants that see every market as worthy of capturing. Among the visiting US companies this week were PepsiCo, American Airlines, Boeing, Cargill and Caterpillar.

BlackBerry Priv wins plaudits, but price tag questioned

REUTERS, Toronto

BLACKBERRY Ltd launched its first Android-based device on Friday, with the future of the company's hardware business riding on a slick smartphone called Priv that boasts an impressive array of features and a hefty price tag.

The company is betting the Priv's large curved screen, full array of Android apps from the Google Play store and blend of productivity and security features will help it rebuild its share of the smartphone market, which has slid to under one percent. With hacking and data theft issues

becoming a bigger concern these days, BlackBerry expects keen interest in its pre-loaded DTEK feature that alerts users every time any app attempts to access data, or turn on the phone's microphone or camera.

"You will be blown away by some of the apps you use and how much data they actually access of yours," said BlackBerry's head of devices, Ron Louks.

The smartphone's "wow" factor, as Louks dubs it, is actually a throwback - a slide out physical keyboard. While the small number of such Android 'slider' phones that do exist have had little success in the market, most are dated and clunky, say analysts.