

Tourist boom threatens Sri Lanka's golden beaches

AFP, Sri Lanka

Tourists have flocked back to Sri Lanka's palm-fringed beaches since a bloody civil war ended in 2009, but environmentalists warn unchecked development means some areas are now so polluted, swimming there is a health hazard.

Sewage from thriving hotels and guesthouses pours, often untreated, out into the water polluting the sea and shore.

Even the country's own tourism minister says he has stopped swimming in the seas close to capital Colombo because of the dirty water.

More than two million visitors now head to the tiny Indian Ocean island every year, more than four times the number that came in 2009.

Yet there are fears it is becoming a victim of its own success.

Guesthouses have sprung up to cater for soaring numbers of visitors -- but often with little thought for how to deal with the waste they produce.

Many simply discharge raw sewage straight into the sea, expos-

ing bathers to potential health issues.

The problem is most acute just south of Colombo at Mount Lavinia, an upscale neighbourhood and resort known for its "Golden Mile" of beach.

Environmental engineering expert Mahesh Jayaweera said the bays in Mount Lavinia were now so polluted that people should not bathe in them.

"When you look at the water you won't notice it. But at certain times of the year, the water in Mount Lavinia is so filthy it is worse than taking a dip in a cess pool," he said.

Levels of faecal contamination at Mount Lavinia are 60 times higher than maximum safe limits, said Jayaweera, of Sri Lanka's University of Moratuwa.

Many visitors are unaware of the dangers, but locals are more aware of potential issues.

"We just come here to play," said local resident Harsha Swadesh, 26, enjoying a game of volleyball with friends. "The sea is rough and it is not very clean."

Unawatuna, just south of the historic port city of Galle, is pro-

moted as a pristine beach perfect for snorkelling and is famous for its coral reefs.

But researchers say it is among the most polluted, with many guesthouses dumping their raw sewage into the ocean, especially at night.

"Sometimes the current brings back most of the stuff back to the beach in the morning and it is awful," said one tourism industry figure who asked not to be named.

Tourism minister John Amaratunga said visitor numbers have soared since the end of Sri Lanka's 37-year-long Tamil separatist war. "This year, our target is 2.2 million tourists, but we may end up with 2.5 million," Amaratunga told AFP.

But he conceded unchecked growth could be having a negative impact on the environment, admitting that he has stopped swimming in the coastal waters off Colombo after seeing sewage flowing into it from a southern suburb of the city.

"I also used to go and bathe at Wellawatte... I stopped it when I saw the canal bringing in all the sewage into the sea," he explained.

He insisted the government was

trying to get the tourist industry to clean up its act.

Authorities have started registering guest houses to try to ensure they dispose of their waste without harming the environment.

Beaches in the former war zone in the island's north, where tourism is still relatively new, remain cleaner.

But Jayaweera said the situation was deteriorating there too -- notably at the popular Nilaweli beach in the eastern district of Trincomalee. Often hailed by travel guides as one of Sri Lanka's "most perfect beaches", visitor numbers have jumped in the past few years.

Industry expert and environmental specialist Srilal Miththapala believes Sri Lanka needs to make urgent changes to ensure the tourism industry survives long term.

"A few years ago, we tried to shift the focus from beaches to ecotourism, but the vast majority still visit us for our beaches," he told AFP.

"The beaches predominate the tourism industry and that is why it is absolutely important for us to clean up and protect the beaches."

Md Arfan Ali, new president of Bank Asia

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Arfan Ali has recently been appointed as the president and managing director of Bank Asia.

An MBA from the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka University, Ali has over 25 years of experience in the banking sector.

He started his career with Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd as a probationary officer in



Md Arfan Ali

1991.

Later, he joined Hanil Bank in 1996 and played key roles in setting up of its Dhaka office.

Ali joined Bank Asia as assistant vice president in 1999, the bank said in a statement yesterday.

He also served IBA of Jahangirnagar University as part-time lecturer for 10 years, according to the statement.

IDLC appoints group chief marketing officer

STAR BUSINESS DESK

IDLC has appointed Jane Alam Romel as group chief marketing officer.

Romel will oversee marketing services of IDLC Finance's subsidiary companies: IDLC Securities, IDLC Investments and IDLC Asset Management. He obtained his BBA from North South University.

Arif Khan, managing director of IDLC Finance, said: "Romel's expertise across multiple sectors such as FMCG, airlines, financial industry and electronics means he is attuned to our



Jane Alam Romel

mindset of creating awareness and coming up with out-of-box marketing platforms with maximum reach."

Romel brings in more than a decade of experience in sales, customer service, marketing and branding.

He began his career with MGH Group and later moved to Singapore Airlines where he held head of sales and marketing position for Bangladesh market.

He also worked for IDLC for four years. Before joining IDLC, Romel was the head of marketing of Rangs Industries.



Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Indian high commissioner in Bangladesh, speaks at the third quarterly luncheon meeting of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka on the premises of the trade body in the capital yesterday. Story on B1



Nur Mohammed, chairman of Jamuna Bank Foundation and chairman of the executive committee of the board; Md Belal Hossain, director of Jamuna Bank, and Shafiqul Alam, managing director, attend the business development meeting of Rajshahi zone, at Parjatan Motel in Bogra.

Moriarty praises progress in factory upgrades

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Alliance member factories have already imparted training to 1.2 million workers on fire and building safety and set up hotlines so that workers can complain to government officials if any dispute arises.

"Bangladesh has become a positive example for safety progress in the garment factories," he said. "We are thinking about replicating the process in other countries."

Alliance members reaffirmed that they will continue to source garment items from Bangladesh, despite the recent militant attacks. Out of 29 retailers and brands under the Alliance umbrella, 14 have their own offices in Bangladesh. "I still did not hear of any Alliance member cancelling their work orders in Bangladesh."

Though the officials of the member companies are not travelling to Bangladesh, they are placing work orders from other countries, or by internet, he said.

The government should work out a plan for what would happen after the two foreign inspection and remediation agencies -- Accord and Alliance -- depart in 2018, he added. The agencies were formed after the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013.

"We have failed to sell our positive achievements in Bangladesh over the years," said Tapan Chowdhury, a member of the board of directors of Alliance. The garment sector has helped empower women in Bangladesh, he added.

"The workers, especially the women, are very hard working. They are our strength. Many do not want to recognise the strength of the workers."

The factories should sincerely take care of their workers, Chowdhury said.

China needs housing space 'the size of Singapore' each year: Fitch

REUTERS

China needs to build residential property space that's roughly equivalent to the land area of Singapore, or 800 million square meters, every year until 2030, Fitch Ratings estimated. This means demand for new housing will remain relatively resilient, a Fitch report released on Monday said.

Fitch's estimate is based on the assumption that over one-third of

new demand will be driven by the demolition of all properties built before 1990, while demand from marriage-driven first-time buyers will decline after peaking in 2013.

The Fitch estimates came at a time of reports of overbuilding and unsold housing stock in many areas of China.

In July, the official Xinhua news agency reported that there are development plans in Chinese cities to

have housing capacity for 3.4 billion people, which is more than 2.5 times China's population and could exacerbate oversupply.

China completed 737 million square meters of residential property in 2015, an 8.8 percent decline from a year earlier. In the first half of 2016, completed residential housing floor space rose 19.2 percent from the same period last year to 290 million square meters.

India calls for simpler capital repatriation

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Bangladesh has emerged as the highest contributor to Indian tourism, crossing the Americans.

Last year, India issued visas to 8.5 lakh Bangladeshis, he said, adding that the number is likely to cross the one million mark this year.

About 7,000 businesspeople, including owners of small and medium enterprises, were issued five-year multiple-entry visas, he said. India has issued around 2,000 business visas to Bangladeshis as of May 31 this year.

"Promoting economic integration and fostering linkages and connectivity between our two countries

through cross-border trade, transport, telecom, cyber, energy links is a policy priority for us." Indian exports to Bangladesh have been declining for the last two years. In fiscal 2014-15, it dipped 3.6 percent.

Between July last year and March this year, Indian exports declined 4.36 percent year-on-year.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's exports have been increasing for the last two years. Bangladesh's exports saw an increase of 15.4 percent in fiscal 2014-15 and 30.8 percent in fiscal 2015-16.

Over the long term, bilateral trade has registered a substantial increase. Since fiscal 2001-02, Bangladesh's

exports to India grew ten times and India's exports (and total trade) grew nearly six-fold, according to Shringla.

In his speech, MCCI President Syed Nasim Manzur said imports and exports are impeded by poor physical infrastructure at the land border points, such as narrow roads, lack of sufficient warehouse space, long tailbacks of trucks for clearance and lack of coordination. "The new bilateral investment treaty is being drafted. We sincerely hope the new treaty will remove all the roadblocks to Bangladeshi investments in India, particularly in retail, manufacturing, and service industries."

Foreign investment plunges

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The foreign investors take into account what the World Economic Forum, the International Finance Corporation's Ease of Doing Business and the Logistics Performance Index are saying about Bangladesh.

But Bangladesh has not improved significantly in these rankings, particularly in the sectors critical for the economy.

In the latest WB's ease of doing business ranking, Bangladesh's position dropped two rungs to 174 out of 189 countries due to stalled regulatory reforms.

The overall private investment rate has gone down in terms of gross domestic product, according to the latest figures from the Bangladesh Bureau of

Statistics.

Bangladesh's ranking is very low when it comes to getting electricity connection, property registration, contract enforcement and dispute settlement.

Alternative systems to resolve dispute and recover defaulted money are not functioning properly.

However, there has been some progress in the preparatory work for the special economic zones by way of signing contracts.

The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority in its governing body meeting last month took a decision that a policy would be formulated to provide one-stop services to those who would invest in economic zones.



Saifur Rahman Lenin, head of corporate services of Labaid; Md Abdulla Khan, manager for corporate services; Aftab Mahmud Khurshid, chief marketing officer of Super Star Group (SSG), and Khandoker Golam Azam, head of human resources, attend a deal signing ceremony on Sunday. The officers and staff of SSG will get special discounts at Labaid's hospitals and diagnostic centres.

Five SIMs can be registered against each NID: regulator

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The chief executives of five private mobile phone operators in a letter to State Minister for Telecom Tarana Halim said the move will discourage digitisation. The operators requested the state minister to review the decision.

They said many people now use multiple devices, including mobiles and tablets, and 3G modems for their laptops and desktops. Services such as vehicle tracking and smart control for home appliances are evolving in Bangladesh through the use of mobile technology, which indicates users need multiple mobile connections, the operators said.

They said, as biometric registration is mandatory for every active mobile connection, many subscribers have to register their children's mobile connections against their NIDs or for their senior family members who cannot commute to the registration points.

The government first mandated SIM re-registration with biometrics in December last year. The six-month re-registration process ended on May 31 this year, and 11.80 crore mobile phone users out of a total of 13.19 crore re-registered their SIMs.