



As part of a government initiative, projects have been taken up to build tourism facilities in places like Tanguar Haor in Sunamganj. Bangladesh now witnesses about two crore local and foreign tourists per year, with locals making up the most, according to the Bangladesh Tourism Board.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Eco and heritage tourism targeted as govt eyes more tourists

SUKANTA HALDER

The government has drawn up a plan to construct facilities across the country to attract both local and international tourists looking for eco-tourism and traveling to heritage sites.

Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people. Heritage tourism is a practice where people visit heritage sites within a country or travel abroad to historical places of significance.

The global ecotourism market size was valued at \$216 billion in 2023, according to market research firm Fortune Business Insights. It was \$587 billion for heritage tourism, said IMARC Group.

Such data for Bangladesh is hard to come by but the country boasts spots and sites that can easily draw tourists from home and abroad if they can offer facilities and the government promotes them.

As part of the initiative of the government, projects have been taken up to build tourism facilities in Tanguar Haor in Sunamganj, the Nijhum Island in Noakhali, Sarankhola in the Sundarbans, Somapura Mahavihara in Naogaon's Paharpur, and the Mawa-end of the Padma Bridge.

The move comes as the number of internal tourists has seen a massive surge in recent years on the back of rising per capita income in a nation tipped to become the ninth-largest consumer market globally by 2030.

There were 40 lakh to 50 lakh tourists, both local and foreign, in Bangladesh three years ago. The number has gone up to two crore now, with locals making up



the most, according to the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB).

The government has placed special emphasis for the development of eco-tourism and heritage tourism in the country, said Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali in June while placing the budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Thanks to the socio-economic progress of the country, there is a growing domestic demand for tourism apart from the interest of foreign tourists, he said.

The government is implementing a 25-year tourism master plan to contribute to economic development through tourism.

Presently, tourism contributes 3.02 percent to the gross domestic product, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data showed. The sector accounts for 8.07 percent of the total employment.

The master plan will serve as a comprehensive roadmap to revitalise the tourism sector. If implemented, its contribution to the national economy will be \$4.77 billion by 2041.

Mohammad Rafeuzzaman, president of the Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh, the apex body of travel agencies, said the government is giving importance to eco-tourism, heritage tourism and MICE tourism.

"These segments have a good prospect." MICE tourism stands for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions tourism and refers to business travel where people go to different places for professional or educational events.

According to Rafeuzzaman, in the case of eco-tourism and heritage tourism, everything must be adapted to the local community and the current situation of biodiversity.

"Work must be done as per proper planning. Otherwise, the environment will be badly damaged."

He added: "Tourism is such a sector where no plan can be taken and implemented in a hurry since if there is an adverse effect for any reason, the sector will have to suffer the consequences in the long run."

Mazharul Islam, deputy director for research and planning at the state-run BTB, said no large brick-made structures will be built in the areas selected for eco and heritage-based tourism.

He said the National Tourism Council will approve the master plan in a few days. "These projects will be implemented in line with the master plan."

He, however, said it would take one and a half years for the projects to secure approval from the planning ministry. Also, foreign funds are being explored to implement the projects.

In the meantime, feasibility studies about the projects will be carried out.

The government has set up destination management organisations in all these areas to attract tourists, according to the budget speech of the finance minister.

Moreover, with the aim of developing a sustainable tourism industry, the government has taken initiatives to provide advanced training to tour operators and guides and registering them.

Projects have already been started to develop Parki in Chattogram, the Hatia and Nijhum islands in Noakhali, and the Mahananda in Chapainawabganj as tourist destinations.

The government also plans to build facilities of global standards in Rangpur, Chandpur, and Cox's Bazar.

The goat that opened the can of worms

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Students and the youth have always played a significant role in shaping the history of Bangladesh. However, a fresh wave of change has been sweeping the nation in recent weeks, and it was initiated by none other than a lone goat!

The sacrificial goat purchased at a ridiculously high price has since become a weapon against corruption, exposing kingpins who were caught completely off guard. Sometimes, light can shine from the most unexpected cracks in the cave of corruption that plagues Bangladesh, revealing its staggering economic shockwaves.

Corruption in Bangladesh is a deep-rooted issue, but its true magnitude often remains obscure. It impacts all sectors, especially the business community, leading to severe economic repercussions. Many businesses are forced to comply with corrupt conditions and practices, which significantly increases the cost of doing business, let alone the process-related harassment and uncertainties involved.

The unlawful collaboration between corrupt government officials and entrepreneurs is detrimental to business operations and results in a loss of national revenue, adversely affecting the tax-to-GDP ratio.

This bleak environment pushes honest companies to either sell or shut down, as they not only find themselves in an unfair playing field but also struggle with bureaucratic red tape, funding crises, and a lack of interest from the new generation. Interestingly, the game of corruption in this country is multi-layered. While we hang the petty thieves who have nowhere to hide except behind Covid masks, the lynchpins stand tall or fly out of the country, emptying their bank accounts.

Corruption reduces tax revenue as businesses underreport earnings or bribe officials to evade taxes, decreasing the tax-to-GDP ratio, which is a critical economic health indicator. Unfair advantages given to corrupt businesses discourage fair investors, leading to reduced foreign and domestic investments, hindering economic growth. Business costs increase due to bribery, raising consumer prices and reducing economic efficiency.

Policy makers have tried to counter the goat's impact by incentivising tax evaders and corrupt entities, further alienating honest taxpayers and businesses. If this trend continues, Bangladesh risks driving away honest entrepreneurs and future generations. The goat's anti-corruption movement has, however, sparked a new awareness and hope, stirring the need for stringent anti-corruption measures and systemic reforms.

Breaking the cycle of corruption requires a multifaceted approach. Strengthening institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission with greater autonomy and resources to promptly investigate and prosecute corrupt activities is essential. Implementing transparency in government and business transactions can significantly reduce corruption.

Protecting and incentivising whistleblowers who expose corrupt practices can also play a crucial role. Encouraging businesses to adopt ethical practices through recognition and rewards, simplifying the tax and other revenue collection systems, and reducing the discretionary powers of tax officials, politicians, and bureaucrats can help lower the scope for corruption.

The government of Bangladesh has made significant strides in digitalising many services, enhancing transparency with the aim to reduce corruption. However, there remain many loopholes that leave sufficient room for human intervention, such as bribery. This issue underscores the need for end-to-end online processes, like successful models in countries like Estonia and Singapore, where automation minimises human involvement and reduces the scope for corruption.

The lone goat's fight against corruption has stimulated a crucial debate about the future of Bangladesh's economy. To ensure sustainable development, the nation must tackle corruption head-on, fostering an environment where honest businesses can thrive and the next generation feels empowered to contribute to building a prosperous Bangladesh.

Considering the storm caused by the telltale goat, perhaps a few hundred such goats are all that we need to make corruption a thing of the past. Maybe it is a blessing in disguise to buy a thousand-dollar goat for ten thousand dollars if it makes Bangladesh a nation free of corruption.

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd.



Air Astra will soon spread wings on int'l routes: CEO

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Air Astra will soon spread its wing on different international routes with its expanded fleet of new aircraft, said Imran Asif, CEO of the newest Bangladeshi airline.

He made the comment yesterday at the launch of Air Astra's frequent flyer programme, ORBIT, to cater to its loyal customers through a tiered membership structure – Eco, Evo, and Pro.

Passengers travelling frequently with Air Astra will accumulate mileage and redeem them for a range of rewards both from the airline's privileged services, including free flights, priority check-in, additional free baggage allowance as well as on the airline's partners' services at hotels, fashion and lifestyle brands, restaurants and cafes for exclusive perks and benefits.

The launching event organised at a city hotel was inaugurated by Rubaba Dowla, country managing director of Oracle Bangladesh.

Sohail Majid, CCO of the airline, was also present among others at the event.

To celebrate the launch and to welcome new members, Air Astra is offering a welcome kit, which includes discount & benefit vouchers from 10 leading brands.

The brands include a diverse portfolio of industries: Sharetrip, GoZayaan, Shahrukh Amin, Twelve Clothing, Apex Footwear, Mana Bay Water Park, Sea Pearl Water Park, Secret Recipe, Red by Afroza Parveen and Foy's Lake Resort.

These brands will offer ORBIT members savings on travel, shopping, dining and entertainment.

China building more wind, solar capacity than rest of the world

AFP, Beijing

China is building almost twice as much wind and solar energy capacity as every other country combined, research published Thursday showed.

The world's second-largest economy is the biggest emitter of the greenhouse gases that drive climate change.

China has committed to bring carbon emissions to a peak by 2030 and to net zero by 2060.

It has endured several waves of extreme weather in recent months that scientists say are rendered more severe by climate change.

China currently has a total of 339 gigawatts (GW) of capacity under construction, including 159 GW of wind and 180 GW of solar.

That is "nearly twice as much as the rest of the world combined", according to the study by Global Energy Monitor, a US based NGO.

The figure far exceeds the second-ranked nation, the United States, which is building a total of just 40 GW, the report said.

It said China has broken ground on a third of new wind and solar capacity it has announced to date, compared to a global average of just seven percent.

"The stark contrast in construction rates illustrates the active nature of China's

commitment to building renewables projects," the study said.

Beijing's vast renewable energy buildup does have some drawbacks.

The national grid falls back on heavily polluting coal plants to deal with surges in

power demand.

And it struggles to transmit renewable energy generated in remote northwestern regions to economic and population centres in the east.

However, China's combined wind and



Workers are seen installing solar panels at a desert solar panel base in Zhongwei, in China's northern Ningxia region.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

solar capacity is set to overtake coal this year, according to the report.

It said the rapid renewables expansion raises hopes that Beijing's carbon emissions will peak even sooner than expected.

In a separate report released on Thursday, the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) found China issued no new permits for coal-based steelmaking projects in the first half of 2024.

CREA said that was the first time on a half-yearly basis that there have been no new permits since China announced its "dual carbon goals" in September 2020 – a development hailed as a possible "turning point" by the independent research organisation.

"As China's steel demand peaks and more scrap becomes available, there is great potential to shift away from coal-based production, representing a significant opportunity for emissions reduction in the next 10 years," CREA's report said.

Scientists say global warming makes extreme weather more frequent and intense.

China has seen a summer blighted by searing heat in the north and torrential rain in the south.

Its weather agency last week forecast very high temperatures to persist in the coming weeks under the impact of climate change.