The beaches of Cox's Bazar are currently teeming with visitors as people from all over Bangladesh are flocking to the popular tourist spot to enjoy their winter vacation. The situation is similar at other destinations in the country, breathing much-needed life into the domestic tourism industry.

PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Domestic tourism heats up this winter

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

If you call your friends and relatives, you may find that some are off in the hills of Sajek valley of Rangamati or the sandy beaches of Cox's Bazar and other tourist hotspots across Bangladesh.

This is because educational institutions in the country have all closed for winter vacation, signalling the start of the main holiday season as families rush to enjoy the rest of 2024 amid the winter weather.

The local tourism industry was suffering from apprehension over the loss of business amid a long recession stemming from mass unrest, which began in July.

But business has been recovering since September and is now ongoing at full swing, industry people said, adding that India's recent visa ban on Bangladeshi nationals has helped bolster domestic tourism.

The return of tourists has enabled hospitality service providers, such as hotels and restaurants, to hope for the recovery of losses sustained due to political turmoil in the third quarter of the current calendar year.

"We are totally full of tourists now. The flow of tourists in December exceeded our expectations," said Abul Kashem Sikder, president of the Cox's Bazar Hotel Guest House Owners Association.

"However, the tourists' purchasing capacity seems to have been eroded by high inflation," he added.

He informed that the overall occupancy rate of hotels, resorts and guest houses in Cox's Bazar, the country's most popular tourist spot, has reached around 80 percent on weekdays and about 100 percent on weekends.

"But the flow of tourists has not increased compared to the previous December," Sikder said.

This year, a number of events, including the national elections, unfavourable weather, recurrent floods, political turmoil centring the Awami League's ouster and deterioration of law and order, affected domestic tourism.

"We had a dull period during July-September. But business started picking up in October and is now good," said Abdul Awal, group director (sales and marketing) of the Sea Pearl Resorts and Spa in Cox's Bazar.

"It appears that the limited visa issuance by India has had a positive effect on the tourist flow," he added.

Industry people say that around 2 lakh tourists are visiting Cox's Bazar each day now, leaving its beaches packed with thousands of visitors, who are enjoying the wind and waves.

Mohammad Faruq, a member of Sea Safe Life Guard, estimated that around 80,000 tourists are now on the beaches of Cox's Bazar during peak hours.

In fact, the number of visitors is so high that some are struggling for accommodation.

Hasan Mir, a tourist from Gopibag of Dhaka, said he and his family came to Cox's Bazar without booking a hotel and had to suffer before finding a suitable hotel.

Tayen Ullah, the owner of Mermaid Resort Saint Martin, said around 2,000 tourists are coming to Saint Martin every day.

"But the number is not enough for locals to run their families round the year. Many hotel owners could not find guests. However, beach side hotel and resort owners are doing good business," he added.

Mirza Musfequr Salahin, chief executive officer of the Travel Together and Ruilui Resort at Sajek, said the tourist flow recently increased.

"You will find many tourists on the streets of Sajek looking for hotels," he added.

However, he also said that it is normal for people to make a mad dash for tourist spots every December.

"We have not seen much of rush this year, particularly in the hills," he added.

According to our correspondent in Patuakhali, the number of people visiting the seaside town of Kuakata has increased amid the ongoing winter vacation and typically peaks on Fridays and Saturdays.

Motaleb Sharif, president of the Kuakata Hotel Motel Owners Association, said they hope the seasonal traders will benefit from the current influx of tourists.

Past glory, future worry

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Years ago, Karim, a skilled fisherman, had a secret trick to catch fish. He would quietly tap the water three times, toss some crumbs, and wait. Like magic, the fish always came. Proud of his "foolproof" method, he passed it down to his grandson, Rafi. One day, Rafi tried the same trick at the river. Confidently, he tapped, tossed, and waited without luck. Suddenly, a loudspeaker blared: "Feeding fish is prohibited. Cameras are watching!" Startled, Rafi saw the fish swim off, unfazed. Morale of the story: Times and contexts change. What worked in the past may not work today, especially when the fish are smarter, and the rules are stricter.

In Bangladesh, family-owned businesses form the backbone of the economy. From textile and manufacturing to retail and trading, these enterprises contribute significantly to employment and GDP growth. Generational businesses such as Abul Khair, TK, PHP, Akij, Ispahani and BSRM Group showcase the potential of visionary leadership and hard work. However, as the market evolves, many family business owners struggle to move beyond the success models of the past. Relying on business practices that are now outdated, they fail to adapt to modern challenges and sustain long-term success.

There's a growing trend of new generation groups venturing into new industries -- from garments to telecom or electronics to FMCG. Oftentimes, many entrepreneurs try to clone the same success formula from the past and rely on their "old loyal brigade" -- employees who thrived in the fax machine era but now blink cluelessly at mentions of TikTok or AI. In today's fast-paced, Gen Z-driven world, handing a typewriter to a digital native won't cut it. Injecting fresh ideas; modern expertise, and addressing the generational gaps are critical for sustained success in any new venture.

Another issue with family business founders is their hesitation in delegating authority or lack of professional coaching to prepare the next generation. Despite having well-educated and competent successors, they seem to think, "You're competent but not just yet." Many wait until God's call comes, only to realise it is too late for the business and the baton.

Family businesses in Bangladesh often begin with a visionary leader who identifies market gaps, takes risks, and builds a thriving empire. In earlier times, simple structures, close-knit leadership, and stakeholder relationships worked in driving growth. But rapid economic developments in the post-independence era and through the 1980s and 1990s created immense opportunities. The ready-made garment industry, for instance, thrived on export-friendly policies and cheap labour. However, strategies like low costs, limited competition, and minimal regulations that succeeded 30 years ago are no longer effective in the present era of globalisation, technological advancements, and fierce competition.

In Bangladesh, new generation family business owners often replicate their predecessors' success models, failing to acknowledge the rapidly evolving business landscape shaped by digitisation, changing consumer behaviour, global competition, and environmental concerns. According to a 2022 International Finance Corporation report, only 30 percent of South Asian family businesses survive into the third generation, a trend mirrored in Bangladesh. What hinders progress are mainly resistance to change, emotional attachment to the founder's legacy, reliance on outdated loyal employees, and centralised decision-making. For long-term growth, businesses must embrace modern expertise, decentralise leadership, and adapt to the dynamic global market to stay afloat.

A few conglomerates demonstrate how modern practices, diversification, and sustainability initiatives are key to success. Preparing the next generation through education, coaching, and exposure ensures long-term growth and competitiveness.

The future of family businesses in Bangladesh is hopeful for those who embrace change, nurture innovation, and empower the next generation. By blending tradition with transformation, these enterprises can thrive, leaving a legacy of resilience, progress, and lasting success.

The author is president of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh and founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

Summit Power seeks time to provide financial report

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Summit Power Limited (SPL) has sought a five-month extension from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission for providing the audited financial report for fiscal year 2023-24, which ended last June.

The report was supposed to be submitted by October this year, the publicly listed company stated in a statement on its website yesterday.

The company said it hoped to hold the associated annual general meeting (AGM) around April or May of 2025.

Public listed companies have to submit audited financial reports within 134 days of the end of a fiscal year and hold the AGM within the following fiscal year.

The financial report of fiscal year 2023-24 was supposed to be published by October 28 and the dividends declared at the same time, said officials.

The statement said Summit Corporation Limited has 18 power plants and of them, the SPL owns 15 which have a combined installed capacity of 976 megawatts (MW).

Of them, 10 plants of the SPL are operational, having a capacity of 808MW, said the statement. Three plants of Summit Corporation Limited are also operational, having a capacity of 1,279MW.

The remaining five of the SPL have been kept shut, either for fuel shortages or expiry of power purchase agreements with the government. They have a combined capacity of 168MW.

China's oil consumption to peak by 2027

REUTERS, *Beijing*

China's oil consumption is set to peak by 2027, state refining giant Sinopec said on Thursday, as diesel and gasoline demand weaken in the world's biggest oil importer, a slowdown that has rattled global oil markets this year.

The 2027 peak will top out at no more than 800 million metric tons, or 16 million barrels per day of crude oil, Sinopec said. Last year, Sinopec forecast peak China oil demand, also at 800 million tons, around the middle of 2026-2030.

China's energy sector faces fresh uncertainty in 2025 with President-elect Donald Trump's return to the White House raising the prospect of heightened trade tensions and potential disruption to Iranian oil exports, said Wang Pei, deputy general manager of the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Trump is expected to tighten sanctions enforcement on Iran, which exports roughly 1.5 million barrels of oil a day, mostly to China and its independent refiners.

"We want to remind everyone to pay attention to the uncertainty of Trump's Iran policy," Wang said during Sinopec's annual outlook event in Beijing.

Trump, however, could also reduce tensions in Ukraine and the Middle East, removing some risk premium, she added.

Driven by the shift towards electric vehicles and the rise of trucks fuelled by liquefied natural gas (LNG), the speed of China's move toward peak oil has taken the industry by surprise, with crude imports on track to peak as soon as 2025, analysts have said.

India gears up for potential trade deal as Trump targets China

REUTERS, *New Delhi*

India is preparing to offer tariffs cuts on some farm and other goods mainly imported from the US, aiming to clinch a broader trade and investment deal once president-elect Donald Trump takes charge, government and industry sources in New Delhi said.

To tackle Trump's threat of a "reciprocal tax" on Indian goods for high tariffs, some officials of the Indian commerce ministry are ready to consider cuts on certain products such as pork, a senior government source said. Currently India slaps about a 45 percent import tariff on pork, which is mostly supplied by the US

Tariffs could also be reduced on high-end medical devices such as pace makers and luxury motor-cycles, including Harley Davidson, said a second official with direct knowledge of trade issues, citing the 25 percent to 60 percent tariffs on these products.

With bilateral trade between India and the US exceeding $118 billion in the 2023/24 fiscal year ending in March, and India enjoying a $32 billion trade surplus, the country is readying for trade talks with the US, aiming to clinch a broader trade and investment deal once president-elect Donald Trump takes office.

To address Trump's concerns over the trade imbalance, officials have also proposed buying more LNG and defence equipment from the US, the second official said.

India's energy imports from the US, including crude oil, refined fuel and coal, were estimated at $12 billion in fiscal 2024, and aircraft and parts at $2 billion. Such imports could rise by $5 billion to $10 billion annually, a third government source, said.

To tackle Trump's threat of a "reciprocal tax" on Indian goods for high tariffs, some officials of the Indian commerce ministry are ready to consider cuts on certain products.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

The government and industry sources spoke on condition of anonymity because the discussions remain confidential.

A commerce ministry spokesman declined to comment.

Commerce ministry officials have previously said they would wait for the Trump administration to take office before any offer of trade talks, while working out plans for possible negotiations.

Indian officials are also sensing an opportunity in Trump's plans to impose up to 60 percent tariffs on Chinese imports, by pitching India as an alternative manufacturing base.

The government has held consultations on the issue within ministries, as well as with local think-tanks and industrial groups, said a government source who attended some of the meetings.

"That is an opportunity," said Arvind Virmani, a government adviser and member of the state-run policy think-tank NITI Aayog.

"It is in the interest of the US and India that more of critical manufacturing or the sensitive manufacturing be done in India rather than China," he said, adding a "preferential trade cum investment deal," which is more ambitious than an earlier proposed mini-trade deal, would benefit both countries.