

Challenges of Tourism Industry in Bangladesh with Reference to Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC)

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***Abstract:** Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), the National Tourism Organization of our country was established in 1973 for the development of tourist facilities and promotional activities. The researcher interviewed policy-makers, tourism consultants, employees of BPC, private tour operators, tourist guides, professionals and concerned government officials with different sets of questionnaires. Apart from this, the researcher also asked open-end questions. Major challenges and their suggestions are discussed in this paper. Moreover, efforts have been made to identify the challenges of tourism industry in Bangladesh and to offer some suggestions to overcome the challenges of the tourism industry of Bangladesh.*

Introduction:

During the Pakistan time (1947-71), there was a Department of Tourism at the center for promotional and regulatory works for the development of tourism. To achieve the desired results the then government set up a Corporation in private sector. Both the Department of Tourism and the Corporation had a few branches in Bangladesh (former East Pakistan). These branches continued functioning till liberation in 1971 (Islam, 2004: 292).

After 1971, the government consolidated the former Corporation and the Tourism Department into an organization called Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) under the Presidential Order No. 143, 1972 (BPC Profile, 2007 : 1). The Corporation came into operation on 11th January 1973 headed by an appointed Chairman by the Government. In the beginning, BPC was under the administrative control of Ministry of Commerce. Latter on, it was handed over to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism and at present it is still operating under the single administrative control of this Ministry (Islam, 2004 : 292). It is an autonomous organization. It has the dual responsibility of development

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related to tourist facilities and potential activities to project the tourist products for favorable image of the country (BPC, 2005 : ii).

2.0 Objectives of the Study

The study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) To identify the challenges of tourism industry in Bangladesh.
- (b) To offer some suggestions to overcome the challenges of tourism in Bangladesh.
- (c) To offer some policy recommendations for the development of tourism industry in Bangladesh.

3.0 Methodology

This study is mainly based on secondary data as well as interview and discussion with the respondents. The secondary data were collected from published official statistics, reports, documents, books, articles, daily newspapers, theses, dissertations, statistics and publications of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, web-sites of related local and international institutions. The researcher interviewed policy-makers, tourism consultants, employees of BPC, private tour operators, tourist guides, professionals and concerned government officials with different sets of questionnaires. Apart from this, the researcher also asked open-end questions. One of the questions was asked to comment on the problems and challenges of BPC and tourism industry in Bangladesh.

4.0 Tourism Industry in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country of romance and a place of enjoyment. The country is full of unique natural beauties, which have attracted the travelers and visitors from all over the World. Many travelers described Bengal as "Tilottoma" (a woman who is a paragon of beauty). Her beautiful natural forests, lakes, rivers and their tributaries, canals, haors, baors, hills, long sea beach, rise and fall of the sea etc., have enhanced its attraction to the travelers.

Bangladesh is blessed with the world's longest (120 kilometer) sea beach lightly slopping down into the water of Bay. Bangladesh has a rich cultural heritage having simple, co-operative, helpful and friendly people. Moreover, the tribal people of Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari

with their distinct culture and distinguishing life style have increased the attraction of many tourists.

The Sundarbans is located in the south-west part of our country. It is the largest mangrove forest of the world. The mangroves and the water-bodies formed together an eco-system and these vast forest resources help maintain bio-diversity.

Bangladesh can be developed as a tourist center because of its unique natural places and strategic position. Tourism industry has already been established as an important industry to earn foreign currency. The contribution from the tourism industry in the GDP is about 4 percent at present (Kayemuddin, 2005: 4-5). Most of the tourists coming to Bangladesh are from North America, Europe, Australia, Middle-east and India.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the National Tourism Organization of our country was established in 1973 for the development of tourist facilities and promotional activities.

4.1 Tourist Facilities of BPC

A tourism is a service oriented industry to project the tourist products and thus to create a favorable image of the country. Since its inception, BPC has renovated the existing tourists' spots. For the tourists, new facilities have been created in the Motels, Cottages, Youth Hostels, Restaurants, Duty Free Shops, Land and Water Transports at different places.

4.2 Promotional Activities of BPC

Promotion of tourism of a country is greatly dependent on the magnitude of publicity. Potential tourist must be made aware of the interesting and important places, scenic beauty, adventurism, health resorts, rich and ramified culture etc. Since its inception, BPC has been taking, as they call it, effective publicity campaign to sell its potentials at home and abroad. Besides, BPC is maintaining liaison with various international tourism and travel trade organizations, disseminating tourist information through various Information Centers, facilitating measures for making easy entry and movement of foreign tourists inside the country.

BPC has been able to secure memberships of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and its Executive Council as well as the Finance and Budget Committee of the WTO, of South Asia Regional Travel

Commission (SARTC), American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) and of Pacific Area of Travel Agents (PATA). Close link with these international organizations and effective participation in their programmes are quite necessary for development and expansion of tourist market in Bangladesh (Morshed, 2006 : 68).

BPC in spite of its fund constraints, has produced and distributed about half a million of different kinds of tourist literatures, folders, booklets, tourist maps, guide books, brochures, picture post cards, view cards, posters, leaflets, accommodation guide etc. These printed materials have been distributed both at home and abroad. Besides, documentary films on important tourist potential areas have been produced and are being shown abroad through the film clubs of main tourist generating countries which receive these films through the Bangladesh Embassies abroad.

In addition, BPC regularly advertises and sends articles for publication in some leading international magazines like the Time News, Far Eastern Economic Review, and Reader's Digest etc. BPC also claimed to launch regular Radio and Television advertising at home and abroad. It is also trying to introduce Bangladesh in the various World tourist guides.

Furthermore, BPC has taken steps for mutual co-operation with neighboring tourist importing country Nepal for joint publicity campaign, joint production of tourist publicity materials, joint marketing, group tours, exchange of travel agents, travel writers, tour-operators, and joint training facilities in various tourist services including hotels. Efforts are being taken for similar co-operation with India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar and Pakistan. In the near future there is a possibility to form a technical committee comprising the members of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) in order to formulate a joint programme aiming at the enhancement of tourist flows into the member countries.

BPC, very recently, has established joint marketing campaign on tourism with BIMAN- the national Airlines of Bangladesh. Another joint programme has also been undertaken with the Department of Archaeology, Government of Bangladesh to publicize important historical places/monuments of the country.

In the internal market, BPC has taken up a sales promotion campaign by launching advertisements through the newspapers, magazines, radio and television highlighting the various tourist facilities. However, it could be

mentioned here that the internal tourist market in Bangladesh is considered to be most under undeveloped and untapped due to many reasons of which poverty, lack of minimum transport facilities, lack of security and probably lack of interest in spending money by the Bangladeshi people for travel and tourism are the main. However, BPC can not take the sole responsibility for the development of internal tourism - the task which should be shared by different government departments (or Ministries) like Information, Home, Railway, IWTA, BRTC, BIMAN, Archaeology and other agencies which can motivate people. The professional associations and clubs may also come forward in this regard (Morshed, 2006 : 60).

BPC in the internal market, used direct mail service to publicize the facilities and attractiveness of the projects, it has implemented to target groups, and occasionally, it communicates with the leading public/private organizations with a view to persuade them to hold their meeting, conferences, seminars etc. in BPC projects mainly in Kaptai and Cox's Bazar. These steps were reported to be quite fruitful.

BPC carries out the following types of promotional activities: (1) Publication of promotional booklets, brochures, posters, videos and media advertisements; (2) Participation in international travel trade fairs; (3) Observing tourism months to make local people more conscious and involved in tourism; and (4) Motivating foreign tourists to visit Bangladesh (Firoz, 2010 : 8).

5.0 Swot Analysis

5.1 Strength

The climate of Bangladesh is very much favorable to the tourists. The country has a tropical monsoon. Its six calendar seasons are characterized by four periods in a year such as cold (December-February), hot (March-May), monsoon (June-September), mild cold (October-November). The average temperature across the country usually ranges between 8 21°C in cold months and between 21 38°C during warmer months (Morshed, 2006 : 7). The strengths include the following points:

- (1) The people of the country are hospitable and welcoming, especially people of the rural areas.
- (2) Virgin natural beauty is a major strength of the country. It is also known as a green country.

- (3) The Sundarbans in the South is the largest mangrove forest in the world. Its wild variety of flora and fauna attracts tourists from far and wide. If exploited properly, it could be the center of attraction for nature loving soft adventurous tourists.
- (4) Kuakata Beach is a place from where sunrise and sunset can be glimpsed, which is a rare opportunity for sun and sea tourists.
- (5) Bangladesh is positioned at the center of South Asia and Zia International Airport is playing a role of gateway to the South Asian countries like Nepal and Bhutan. Tourists can have a stopover on their journey to and from their destination.
- (6) Bangladesh possesses wide variety of tribal people in different parts of the country (especially the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Mymensingh and Sylhet). The tribal people and culture is a big attraction for the tourists visiting the country.
- (7) Cox's Bazar beach is one of the longest unbroken beaches of the world. It is 120 km long at a stretch. Initiatives have been taken to develop beach facilities for the tourists.
- (8) Bangladesh has a number of Buddhist sites and Hindu temples. If properly developed, they could attract religious tourists from India and the Far East.
- (9) As there are hundreds of rivers criss-crossed Bangladesh, there has an immense potentiality of riverine tourism in Bangladesh.
- (10) Bangladesh is located strategically in a very vital position of the South Asia. It is a connecting point in the South Asia.

5.2 Opportunities

It is not very difficult to implement eco-tourism, riverine tourism and spiritual tourism as the country possesses enough opportunity to develop these types of tourism. Government has formulated favorable foreign investment policy to attract overseas investors in readymade garments, leather goods, natural gas and petroleum sector and liberal policy for joint venture investment in tourism sector as well.

5.3 Weaknesses

The following points show the weaknesses in this area:

- (1) The main weakness is the country's infrastructure. It is not well developed for suiting the needs of the tourists.
- (2) The political situation is not stable and often hartal and strikes discourage the tourists to visit the country.
- (3) Fund allocation on tourism is insufficient.
- (4) A large number of people are still illiterate, so they can not play their role in the development initiatives including tourism.
- (5) The country often suffers from image crisis. The country continues to remain as an unknown destination to the tourist generating countries.

5.4 Threats

The followings are the threats for the tourism industry in Bangladesh:

- (1) Natural disasters are the biggest threat for the country especially flood and cyclone.
- (2) Unstable political situation already created a bad image abroad, which is the biggest threat for the development of tourism industry overseas.
- (3) Continuous campaign against Bangladesh by certain quarters as a fundamentalist country is another obstacle. This is a threat because it may raise socio-economic problems in future.
- (4) Rapid growth rate of population is another big problem. Bangladesh is already one of the most densely populated countries of the world. This is a threat because it may raise socio-economic problems in future.

6.0 Challenges of Tourism Industry in Bangladesh

There are some challenges/shortcomings/problems and bottlenecks in the development of the tourism in Bangladesh. These are:

- (1) The national museum in our country is less attractive because of poor lighting and decoration and unattractive display of the different items of the museum.

- (2) Very limited spots are available for tourism and these spots are put under increasing high pressures.
- (3) There is a shortage of infrastructure necessary for the proper development of existing as well as feasible tourist spots.
- (4) Adequate attention has not been focused on the promotion of environment, cultural and religious properties while planning for the development of tourism.
- (5) There is a lack of appropriate programmes that would inspire tourists to stay longer in Bangladesh and to incur higher expenditure in Bangladesh.
- (6) Adequate effective implementation of the promotional works has not been made for the development of tourism.
- (7) The services and capacity of international airlines which have a direct linkage with Dhaka, Bangladesh are insufficient. Flight information services are not adequately available in all of the airports.
- (8) Internal air services are limited and the services are not up to the required standard. In the same way, adequate infrastructures are yet to be completed for the development of air transport.
- (9) Until now, it has not been possible to increase the tourist inflow all round the year. Consequently, the impact of seasonality on tourism is prevalent.
- (10) Tourism sector has not yet been able to maintain close linkages with other economic sectors.
- (11) In totality, there exists a problem of the supply of necessary materials, for the promotion of tourism.
- (12) There is a lack of appropriate policy, incentives, appropriate rules and regulations and their effective application.
- (13) There is lack of proper security for the tourists between the hotels and to the tourist spots.
- (14) There is communication problem between the hotels and to the tourist spots.

- (15) There is disturbance from the local muscleman in the tourist spots.
- (16) There is lack of proper advertising and publicity about our attractive tourist spots.
- (17) There is lack of proper maintenance of existing spots.
- (18) A quick development of the potential tourist spots is lacking.
- (19) Officers of BPC are not adequately trained on the tourism (Kayemuddin, 2005 : 5).
- (20) Bangladesh's image problem abroad as a tourist destination is a weak point.
- (21) Lack of knowledge among the planners and policy makers about the fast growing tourism industry in the world and of its role as an important earner of foreign exchange is responsible.
- (22) Discontinuity in the implementation of policies and programmes for tourism promotion with the change of governments is another weak point.
- (23) Insufficient infrastructural facilities such as roads, railway, air and riverine communication and lack of coordination among the government agencies are responsible for underdevelopment of tourism.
- (24) Poor investment from private sector in tourism is another weak point.
- (25) Lack of encouragement to foreign investors to develop tourism in isolated islands such as Saint Martin's, Sonadia, etc (especially for the foreign tourists).
- (26) Lack of appropriate steps for promotion of rural based tourism.
- (27) Lack of skilled and professional manpower in the sector.
- (28) Lack of easy availability of visa for regional and international tourists is another hindrance to develop tourism (Mondal, 2006: 7).

7.0 Problems of BPC

BPC is suffering from many problems. The problems are multi-dimensional also. Some of these are:

- (1) Planned marketing and publicity play a vital role to promote tourism products for destinations. Continuous promotion of tourism products through publicity media and tourist publications motivate potential visitors to a country. Due to scarcity of fund and programme, BPC is yet to implement aggressive promotion and marketing campaign at home and abroad (Islam, 2004 : 3000).
- (2) Tourism has recently been recognized as a significant sector for socio-economic development of a country. But BPC has not yet got required allocation on priority basis. As a result, BPC does not take adequate development projects for the development of the backward tourist spots in the different places of Bangladesh.
- (3) Skilled and professional manpower is a prerequisite to develop and promote tourism in a country. The National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute, the only institute of its kind in the country cannot cope with requirement of trained manpower for this expanding service industry (Islam, 2004 : 300).

8.0 Performance of BPC in Relation to Promotion of Tourism

Performance of BPC in relation to promotion of tourism and development of tourist facilities and services seems to be unsatisfactory. In fact, BPC seems to function more as an administrative unit of the government than a challenging marketing organization. BPC has failed to develop any pragmatic promotional strategy to increase the image of Bangladesh abroad; nor it could give any directions to private sector to share the vast task of developing infrastructural facilities needed for tourism development (Hassan, 1992 : 50).

9.0 Analysis of Survey Results and Opinions of Different Policy-makers, Tourism Consultants, Employees of BPC, Private Tour Operators, Tourist Guides, Professionals and Concerned Government Officials

The researcher interviewed policy-makers, tourism consultants, employees of BPC, private tour operators, tourist guides, professionals and concerned government officials with different sets of questionnaires. Apart from this, the researcher also asked open-end questions. One of the questions was asked to comment on the problems and challenges of BPC

and tourism industry in Bangladesh. The responses are summarized below.

9.1 Challenges of Tourism Industry in Bangladesh Identified by the Respondents

These are: (1) Lack of safety and security; (2) Image problem abroad; (3) Insufficient infrastructural facilities; (4) Discontinuity in the implementation of policies and programs for tourism promotion with the change of governments; (5) Lack of knowledge among the planners and policy makers about the fast growing tourism industry in Bangladesh; (6) Lack of skilled and professional manpower in BPC; (7) Lack of arrangements of residence for the tourists; (8) Lack of proper publicity at home and abroad; (9) Lack of accommodation, food, shopping center etc; (10) Political instability in Bangladesh; (11) Image of natural disaster-prone country abroad; (12) Lack of adequate fund; (13) No allocation of fund for tourism in the National Budget; (14) Lack of priority in this sector; (15) Massive corruption; (16) Lack of private and foreign investment; (17) Lack of modern marketing strategy; (18) Poverty in Bangladesh; (19) Low per capita income; (20) Lack of co-operation of different ministries of the government; and (21) Lack of government initiatives.

9.2 Problems of Implementation of Tourism Projects as Identified by the Employees of BPC

The following problems are identified by the employees of BPC. (1) Lack of adequate fund; (2) Lack of sufficient infrastructure; (3) Lack of coordination among the ministries, departments and agencies; (4) Lack of government planning and policy; (5) Bureaucracy; (6) Lack of motivation; (7) Delay of projects' approval; (8) Many steps are taken to approve the project; (9) Lack of tourism experts who think, imagine about tourism projects; (10) Lack of government support; (11) Government red-tape formalities; (12) People's less awareness of the budget of tourism , for that reason they are less cooperating; (13) Lack of appropriate project proposal; (14) Lack of skilled and professional manpower in BPC; (15) Overseeing from different ministries; (16) Lack of knowledge for proper projects; (17) Lack of efficient manager to manage it; (18) The inadequate role of BPC in developing the tourist image of Bangladesh; (19) Absence of essential infrastructural systems and facilities needed for the tourists; and (20) Failure in identifying the target and potential markets.

10.0 Suggestions

The following suggestions are offered to overcome the problems. (1) A tourism board should be established. (2) Bureaucrats can hardly promote tourism. So the BPC is to be headed by a career oriented professional personnel. (3) Tourist-police should be introduced in tourist spots. (4) To create awareness among the citizens about the benefits of tourism development. (5) To motivate people to take care of the visitors and let them know that they are not the stranger. (6) Priority to be given on tourism sector. (7) To develop infrastructure and road network connecting Dhaka with all tourist attractions of Bangladesh. (8) To simplify the visa and immigration formalities. (9) To ensure safety and security for tourists, especially at the tourist spot. To use specially trained-up police in tourism security or "tourist police". (10) To establish coordination among all the concerned ministries, departments and agencies. (11) To allocate fund in the national budget and initiate loan system for private sector tourism entrepreneurs and tour operators including BPC to create more facilities. (12) To publish brochure/catalogue describing the attractions of religious heritage products of Muslim relics, Buddhism and Hinduism. BPC can translate its brochures in different languages including Japanese, Chinese and German. (13) To entrust BPC with the responsibility to issue registration to hotels/motels and tour operators, and strictly monitor the performance and standard of private sector tourism training institutes. (14) To exempt tourism industry from the purview of tax and VAT at least for 10 years. (15) Community awareness and participation, social tolerance for tourists should be created. (16) To run tourism business both by the government and private sector simultaneously to maintain the standardization of services. (17) To give orientation to Economic Councilors of the foreign missions of Bangladesh on tourism. Include a topic on tourism in the foundation course of Foreign Affairs Cadres. (18) To activate Bangladesh's Embassies abroad for attracting tourists. (19) Placement of a few tourism personnel at the foreign missions of Bangladesh in the highly potential tourist generating countries. (20) To develop Multi-lingual Tour Guides and attach them with BPC. (21) To invite tourism experts, journalists and travel writers and famous tour operators to expose the Bangladesh products. (22) To improve the standardization of training method in NHTTI and initiate to get affiliation of NHTTI to Dhaka University or any other recognized university. (23) To enhance and activate the National Tourism Council headed by the Prime Minister. (24) A committee involving local administration,

politician, social workers and administrators may be arranged in every tourist attraction area. (25) A Tourism Board under the direct supervision of Prime Minister may create an effective way for tourism development. (26) To take initiative to include tourism as a separate subject at schools and colleges. (27) Private and public banks and other financial institutions should come forward to arrange 'tourist loan' so that people may be interested to visit different tourist spots of the country.

11.0 Policy Recommendations

In addition to the suggestions, a set of important policy implications is offered herewith for consideration of the authorities concerned:

- (1) The functions and responsibilities of BPC should be reviewed and reformulated.
- (2) BPC should be responsible for policy formulation, implementation, resource collection and coordination.
- (3) For marketing the services and facilities of BPC owned tourist plans and installations, a marketing organization, probably named as Bangladesh Parjatan Marketing Corporation may be set up with government and private participation. Besides, to encourage private sector investors in this new industry, BPC should identify the probable and profitable areas for the private investors. Special treatment and facilities should be offered to private investors and operators.
- (4) BPC should change its marketing strategy with an aim of building up the image of Bangladesh rather than to promote a particular tourist spot of the country.
- (5) Close cooperation among SAARC countries is necessary to formulate unified strategies to increase tourist inflow to this region.
- (6) A high powered National Body for tourism development should be constituted with experts from BPC, Department of Archaeology and Museums, Ministries of Education and Culture, Home Affairs, Civil Aviation and Tourism, Communication, Public Works, Finance etc. and experts from universities and other related professional bodies and organizations.
- (7) The foreign tourist's documentation process and system should be changed and made more useful.

- (8) A sufficient fund should be allocated to this sector in the National Budget.
- (9) Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects should be introduced in this sector.
- (10) Special Tourist Zones should be allocated for the foreign tourists.

12.0 Conclusion

Promotion of tourism of a country is greatly dependent on the magnitude of publicity. Potential tourist must be made aware of the interesting and important places, scenic beauty, adventurism, health resorts, rich and ramified culture etc. Since its inception, BPC has been taking, as they call it, effective publicity campaign to sell its potentials at home and abroad. However, performance of BPC in relation to promotion of tourism and development of tourist facilities and services seems to be unsatisfactory. In fact, BPC seems to function more as an administrative unit of the government than a challenging marketing organization. BPC has failed to develop any pragmatic promotional strategy to increase the image of Bangladesh abroad; nor it could give any directions to private sector to share the vast task of developing infrastructural facilities needed for tourism development. Efforts have been made in this article to identify the challenges of tourism industry in Bangladesh and to offer some suggestions to overcome the challenges of the tourism industry of Bangladesh. The problems that have had been identified here, if overcome, and the corresponding suggestions taken into consideration Bangladesh would be a flourishing tourist spot of the world.

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