

Concerted efforts are must for inclusive growth in tourism

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Dhaka : Unlike most other industries, tourism worldwide has a special day of its own - September 27 - dubbed as the World Tourism Day. When the unfortunate coronavirus pandemic emerged, the first blow went towards global tourism. Worldwide tourism was at a standstill for over a year, even leading to many permanent closures of tourism related businesses.

And now in the post pandemic era, tourism can only rebound with concerned efforts by all. This is what this year's World Tourism Day focused on with the theme "Tourism of Inclusive Growth".

Celebration of WTD in BD

The World Tourism Day was observed in the country on September 27 like elsewhere in the world focusing on the inclusive growth in the global travel and leisure arena.

The government and different organisations held various programmes, maintaining the health protocols due to the Covid-19 pandemic, to celebrate the day with the global theme 'Tourism for Inclusive Growth'.

To mark the day, Bangladesh Tourism Corporation organised a cooking show at 9 am at the Parjatab Bhaban in the city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area while Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) held a discussion at 9:30 am at the same venue.

The cooking show was followed by a seminar with the purpose of discussing the importance of the occasion. State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mahbub Ali participated in the seminar as the Chief Guest.

Speaking on the occasion, he said, "The country's tourism industry has so far created employment opportunities for 40 lac people. In 2019, the tourism industry contributed BDT 950.7 billion or 4.3 per cent to the national GDP. Soon, it will contribute more, up to 6 per cent."

"To increase the industry's contribution to the national economy and employment opportunities in the sector, new facilities and services are being introduced across various popular tourist sites of the country."

"Only in Cox's Bazar, we have taken an initiative to establish three tourist parks. Once complete, there will be opportunities of holding additional USD 200 crore worth economic activities and employment of 40 thousand people."

"Besides, to include marginal communities in the tourism industry's progress, we have initiated village tourism and community based tourism development projects countrywide," the state minister concluded.

Later, BTB brought out a horse carriage rally from the venue and paraded different streets of the city.

President Md Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the eve of the day wishing all-out success of the programmes marking the day.

The President, in his message, welcomed the initiative of observing the 'World Tourism Day-2021' in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world. "I think this year's theme of the day 'Tourism for Inclusive Growth' will encourage universal participation in the activities of the tourism industry for economic and social development," he said.

Noting that the development of a planned, well-regulated and inclusive tourism industry plays an important role in creating employment and economic development in a country, Hamid said it is possible to achieve inclusive growth by utilising the potential of the labor-intensive tourism industry through creating massive employment opportunities as well as involving the local population in the industry.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in her message, said tourism is recognised as the most labor intensive and largest service industry in the world today.

"In the current context of Bangladesh, the importance of tourism is essential for the inclusive economic growth of the country including poverty alleviation, massive job creation and improvement of living standards of marginalised people," she added.

Noting that Bangladesh is a land of scenic natural beauty with rich culture and heritage, the head of the government said it is also rich in flora and fauna, and has numerous rivers, archaeological sites, religious places, hills, forests, waterfalls, tea gardens etc.

"The world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans is situated in Bangladesh. The largest unbroken sandy sea beach in the world is also located in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar," she said.

The vast haors in the north-eastern parts of the country, the hills in Chattogram division and lives of small ethnic people are some of the attractions for the tourists, Sheikh Hasina said, adding the emerald eye-catching greens of rural Bangladesh and its rich culture can also be an added attraction for the holidaymakers.

"Tourism has a huge potentiality in Bangladesh. Of late, it has emerged as an important sector of economic development with more and more domestic and foreign tourists visiting the country's tourists' destinations," the premier said.

UNWTO's message

Official Message by Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, UNWTO, stated, "The human desire to travel and explore is universal, which is why tourism must be open for everyone to enjoy. So too must the many social and economic benefits that tourism brings be available to everybody. World Tourism Day 2021 highlights the power of 'Tourism for Inclusive Growth'."

"By celebrating this day, we state our commitment that, as tourism grows, the benefits that come will be felt at every level of our broad and diverse sector, from the biggest airline to the smallest family business."

"Today, we reaffirm our pledge that, as we move forward and work to build a more prosperous and peaceful world through tourism, we will not leave anyone behind."

Post pandemic tourism

In the post pandemic era, domestic tourism will flourish on its own. The recent boom in domestic travel amid the pandemic signals to it.

However, international tourism will rebound 14 per cent by 2022, 29 per cent by 2023, and 50 per cent by 2024 of the pre-pandemic times, UNWTO said in a research.

Bangladesh has never been successful in presenting itself in the international or even regional market. Yet it is vital to have a strong footing at least in the regional market to revive back from the pandemic losses. This calls for inter-ministry cooperation and public-private partnerships.

The revival of tourism in post pandemic requires concerted efforts by tourism ministry, home ministry, foreign ministry, water transport ministry, railways ministry, and other departments and organisations related to tourism. Private tourism entities also need to bring more unity among them for the rebound to be successful.

The government has taken many initiatives for the development of the nation and its tourism. However, none of that is reflected in tourism due to incoherence of all parties concerned.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism must appoint at least one secretary to oversee the tourism activities. Since MoCAT prioritises the aviation sector more, tourism often remains neglected.

Likewise, private organisations are running on their own. Airlines, hotels, and ships - all worry about their own benefits only. Concerted efforts are required among them as well, to make the country's multi-dimensional tourism more integrated and progressive. This will make the country's position strong in the post pandemic travel era.

If the country's tourism bears fruits, everyone from cities to villages will get to enjoy its taste. From businessmen to marginal communities, all will be benefited.

Tourism now needs sustainable economic and environment management activities so that we do not ruin the national resources for tourism purposes.

Prosperity in sustainable tourism can come from integrated planning and appropriate action. Public and private partnerships can lead towards it. The development plans must include marginal communities. Eradication of poverty through tourism must be a priority. Environmental protection and sustainable management activities will carry us towards prosperity in tourism.