

## Frequent change of BTB CEO leaves country's tourism hanging

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 16 May, 2022



Dhaka : Established in 2010, Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) saw nine CEOs in ten years, taking charge, one after another, to guide the country's tourism industry towards the development that has been forever untapped. This lingering curse of a practice\_ frequent changes of the board chiefs\_ has always prevented BTB from fulfilling its promise, similar to the fate of the other national tourism organisation Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

In the long line of BTB's CEOs, the latest and ninth entry Javed Ahmed recently retired on May 6, 2022, only after two years of his joining in February 16, 2020, leaving Abu Taher Md Jaber, former Director, operating as the Acting CEO currently.

Again, as history proved from time to time, such a frequent change might again pull the plug on implementing the ongoing development projects of the country's tourism sector including the long-awaited tourism master plan which has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

While the tenure of Javed Ahmed as CEO at BTB remained short, it was further shadowed by the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the tourism sector of the country as well as the world. He joined at a time when the country was at a halt and so was the tourism industry.

Joining amid a global crisis, what Javed Ahmed led BTB to first undertake was the formation of Standard Operating Procedure during Covid-19, with which the tourism sector resumed its operations in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic.

"There had been some defiance in following the SOPs as we lacked resources in field level. However, the SOP was, indeed, implemented."

Javed Ahmed, former CEO of BTB, said in an interview with The Bangladesh Monitor before leaving his duties at the national tourism organisation and going into retirement.

#### Research works

Javed Ahmed stressed that he attempted to turn the challenging times of the coronavirus pandemic, when tourism was almost null, into moments of opportunity by carrying out research works in the meantime.

For this purpose, BTB, in collaboration with BIDS, published the "first ever" detailed and complete research that highlighted the losses incurred by the country's tourism industry and its sub-sectors' due to Covid-19 and the ways to revive them in the post-pandemic era, said Javed Ahmed.

Moreover, in collaboration with COMSEC of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), BTB carried out another study to rejuvenate the small entrepreneurs of the country's tourism industry who suffered from countless losses due to Covid-19.

The former CEO of BTB further stressed the need of policies for the tourism industry. "There was a need for separate policies for different kinds of tourism the country offers -- adventure tourism, riverine tourism, religion tourism and so on. For this purpose, we formulated 26 policies."

During his tenure, BTB carried out another research to identify the human capital necessity in the tourism sector till 2030 in line with the SDG Goals.

Javed mentioned, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there had been no opportunity for BTB to participate in international fairs or organise FAM trips abroad. "Rather, we invested our time and money in carrying out the aforementioned research works that would be key to take our tourism industry forward," claimed Javed Ahmed.

Since the pandemic kept BTB from bringing in foreigners from abroad for destination promotion purposes, the organisation arranged FAM trips across the country with the foreign diplomats working in Bangladesh. "For this purpose, we chose the international ready products like the Sundarbans and others," noted Javed Ahmed.

#### Regional tourism promotion

In the post-pandemic era, regional or cross-border tourism shows great promise as the way forward for Bangladesh. With this aim, BTB organised Bangladesh-Nepal Tourism Promotion and B2B Exchange Programme and invited its Nepalese counterpart on March 2, 2022.

A 14-member delegation from Nepal visited Bangladesh for this purpose and enjoyed the beautiful destinations and tourism products the country has to offer, expressed Javed Ahmed.

"B2B connectivity between the stakeholders of Bangladesh and Nepal has paved way for a breakthrough in tourism exchange," said Javed Ahmed.

#### Master plan at risk of delay

Covid-19 made the road to finishing the tourism master plan thorny. As a result, the master plan underwent delay, said Javed Ahmed.

Nevertheless, while working on preparing the tourism master plan, the former BTB CEO shared with a heavy heart that he learned "no one has time for tourism".

"Even the important people from the government were reluctant to give time to the enumerators of BTB looking for information. This showed how much neglected tourism in Bangladesh is," sighed Javed.

To break this mindset, Javed led BTB to organise virtual meetings amid the pandemic in every district with respective politicians and administration. The State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali also attended the virtual meetings with a view to engaging the public in tourism.

Leaving no stones unturned to ensure public participation, Javed claimed BTB successfully conveyed the message - "Tourism in Bangladesh has immense potential. But to tap it, we need your cooperation."

As a result, the Bangladesh Tourism Board got to resume its works to prepare the tourism master plan following the pandemic. And now they intend to complete the master plan by December 2022. For this purpose, the government has engaged a reputed international consultancy firm, named IPE Global, to prepare the master plan on tourism.

However, the change of the latest BTB CEO might again stain the preparation works of the tourism master plan by delaying it further.

Apart from these, Javed Ahmed, during his tenure, developed 75 tourism volunteers collaborating with United Nations Volunteer Organisation and established many basic facilities for tourists at popular tourism destinations across the country to pave way for sustainable tourism in the future.