

## **Rapid Comprehensive Tourism Recovery Plan required immediately to save industry from turmoil**

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 17 August, 2024



Dhaka: During the recent mass uprising that toppled the country's Awami League government on August 5, many countries worldwide including the top tourist generating source markets-Japan, Europe and the United Kingdom-advised against travel to Bangladesh over safety and security concerns of their travellers.

Even after the new interim cabinet took oath of office on August 8, the travel alerts imposed by other countries are still in effect as political uncertainty remains countrywide. As a result, the country's tourism industry, especially inbound-which brings in foreign currency-is in severe turmoil. In this context, the government must adopt a Rapid Comprehensive Tourism Recovery Plan immediately.

As a reference, Bangladesh can follow Sri Lanka's footsteps, which recently suffered similarly from terror attacks, a severe financial crisis

and a political meltdown. Sri Lanka has implemented a four-year strategic plan for the tourist sector from 2022 to 2025. Thanks to the recovery plan, Sri Lanka's economy has begun to improve. Its purpose is to set an agenda for the recovery and future resilience of the tourism sector.



***Rafeuzzaman***

The nation considers the rapid recovery of tourism sector is required as foreign exchange flows are critical, not only for the tourist sector and the livelihoods of people and firms within it-but also for all 22 million Sri Lankans. Their Central Bank's October 2021 Roadmap for macroeconomic and financial system stability provides evidence that returning the tourist sector to growth is now their national priority.

Thus, according to industry stakeholders, similar to Sri Lanka, it is high time the country started its efforts to quickly revive the ailing industry currently reeling from nationwide political uncertainty.

In this regard, while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at its office in the capital recently, Md Rafeuzzaman, President of Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh; Taufiq Rahman, CEO of Journey Plus; and Masud Hossain, Managing Director of The Bengal Tours, mentioned the following recommendations:

**(1) Tourism crisis management committee :** Since, recent records show, tourism is always the first to get hit by crises, be that a pandemic or a political unrest, hence, it is paramount the government forms a tourism crisis management committee to quickly revive the vulnerable industry.



***Taufiq Rahman***

**(2) Ensure traveller safety :** To save the tourism industry currently in turmoil, first and foremost, it is essential for the government to bring back political stability countywide as well as to ensure travellers' safety and security. Tourist police can be utilised.

**(3) Disseminate information quickly :** Once the situation is back to normal in terms of safety and security, the information must be disseminated through BTB, media and embassies in top tourist

generating markets to bring back travellers' faith in visiting Bangladesh again.

**(4) Keep marketing channels open :** Marketing channels should always be open under any circumstance. The government should provide constant travel updates to keep the tourist generating markets aware about the latest situation in Bangladesh.

**(5) Hire PR company for promotion :** The government should consider hiring an international standard Public Relations company to carry out advertising and branding activities aimed at promoting Bangladesh as an attractive destination to visit. Corporates can sponsor these initiatives in exchange of certain waivers.

**(6) Attend int'l tourism fairs :** Attending international tourism fairs is a must to promote Bangladesh as a destination. BTB should formulate an annual calendar with schedules of all the possible promotional events and prepare to participate accordingly.

**(7) Biman should play role :** In promotional activities, the flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines can play a vital role. Biman can promote Bangladesh as a must-visit destination in all the countries it flies to.



***Masud Hossain***

**(8) Dedicated official for tourism :** There should be an officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dedicated to tourism. Similarly, the Bangladeshi embassies and high commissions in top tourist generating markets should have desks dedicated to tourism promotion and queries.

**(9) Potential tourism products :** Eco-tourism, women empowerment activities and community tourism are potential products to brand in the top source markets to attract visitors.

**(10) Utilise NRBs :** The huge non-resident Bangladeshi population worldwide can be utilised. It is estimated, Bangladeshis are the sixth-largest group of migrants in the world with an estimated 13 million living abroad in as many as 162 countries. Hence, the government should start encouraging the NRBs to visit Bangladesh with family and friends. They can be offered special rates. This alone will generate over 10 lac arrivals a year. As reference, the government can take inspiration from a similar initiative of Nepal that encouraged their expatriates to

visit the country, bringing a friend along.

**(11) Keen nature intact :** In the pursuit of driving arrival numbers, the country must not jeopardise the nature or the environment. Therefore, it is imperative to have separate travel guidelines for each destination in an effort to promote sustainable tourism.

**(12) Recognise inbound tour operators :** The stakeholders urged the government to enlist or recognise inbound tour operators as remittance earners and offer them incentives. This, in turn, will help make tourism an export product.