

Govt restricting tourism to protect country's wetlands, coral-rich island

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Dhaka : In an effort to protect biodiversity hotspots countrywide, the government plans to restrict tourism and introduce environment-friendly guidelines for tourists visiting the Ecologically Critical Areas (ECAs) of Bangladesh.

The coral reef-rich Saint Martin's Island and one of the country's largest haors Tanguar Haor-a habitat for breeding fish and waterfowls-will soon witness the first tourism restrictions.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Advisor, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry, said, "Initially, we will impose restrictions on night stays at Saint Martin's Island to reduce the pressure on the island soon."

"Gradually, we will increase the level of restrictions as well as the

number of ECAs under tourism restrictions," she informed.

She added, some of these restrictions would include banning the use of single-use plastic, minimising the number of visitors and banning all kinds of tourism during the breeding season of the region's wildlife.

"After implementing the tourism restrictions on the coral-rich island, we will focus on Tanguar Haor," she said.

The government is working with different stakeholders, including tour operators and local communities, to find a sustainable way to protect these ecologically important areas, she also claimed.

Since 1999, Bangladesh has declared 13 biodiversity-rich areas as ECAs under the Environment Protection Act, 1995.

According to the ECA rules, any development work and other activities like tourism that threaten biodiversity and ecology are strictly prohibited in the ECAs.