

Shakawath Hossain pioneers 'cricket tourism' to boost Bangladesh's global image

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Dhaka : Bangladesh may soon witness a new chapter in its tourism and hospitality industry with the introduction of "cricket tourism," a fresh concept brought forward by Shakawath Hossain, Chief Executive Officer of Unique Hotel and Resorts PLC. Hossain, who also serves as Advisor to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President for 'Cricket Tourism', believes cricket - the country's most beloved sport - can become a gateway to attract visitors, boost local economies, and showcase Bangladesh's diverse destinations on the world stage.

"Cricket is deeply rooted in our culture. It is our passion and our pride. At the same time, it is one of the most popular sports globally," Hossain said in an exclusive interview with The Bangladesh Monitor. "If we connect cricket with tourism, the potential for Bangladesh is immense. This model is already being practiced successfully in other countries. It's time we embrace it."

Linking cricket with travel

The vision is simple yet innovative: whenever national or international cricket matches are held in Bangladesh, they should be tied to tour and hospitality packages. Hossain envisions tournaments being hosted not just in Dhaka or Chattogram, but in tourist-centric destinations such as Cox's Bazar, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barishal, and beyond.

Visitors traveling to watch the games would be offered packages combining accommodation in sea-view rooms, domestic air tickets, local cuisine, sightseeing tours, match passes, and even exclusive meet-and-greet sessions with cricketers. "Imagine watching a high-voltage international match in Cox's Bazar, then relaxing in a five-star resort with ocean views, meeting famous players on the beach, and later exploring nearby attractions under a guided tour," Hossain explained.

He pointed to England's "Barmy Army," the well-known group of fans who travel overseas to support their cricket team. "We can develop something similar in Bangladesh - communities of fans who don't just watch matches but also create vibrant festivals around them. This will strengthen our sports culture and tourism simultaneously."



Trophy unveiling program at a popular tea garden in Sylhet

Trophy tours, destination festivals

The cricket tourism blueprint extends beyond matches. Trophy unveiling ceremonies could be organized at iconic locations such as Kuakata and the Sundarbans. "Imagine a festival in Kuakata where fans watch both the sunrise and sunset at the beach as part of a trophy event. Or unveiling a trophy in the Sundarbans, one of the world's natural wonders. These kinds of experiences will draw both domestic and international visitors," Hossain said.

He added that such initiatives would also promote "food diplomacy," with visiting players and fans experiencing traditional Bangladeshi cuisine through food festivals. "When international teams tour Bangladesh, we can take them to our heritage sites, arrange cultural

programs, and let them taste authentic dishes. This is how tourism can go hand-in-hand with cricket."

Global examples of success

Hossain cited Sri Lanka's successful model, where the cricket board and tourism board jointly host youth teams from countries like Australia. "At the moment, an under-18 girls' team from Australia is playing in Sri Lanka for two months. They will tour destinations in addition to playing matches. The cricket board handles the games, while the tourism board facilitates travel and hospitality. We should do the same in Bangladesh," he stressed.

Similarly, in countries such as Australia and England, celebrities and travel operators actively promote tournaments, making them not just sporting events but tourism spectacles. "Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, celebrities are not engaged in promoting tournaments. This is a missed opportunity that must be corrected," Hossain observed.

Private sector expertise crucial

Unique Hotels and Resorts PLC, under its founder Mohammad Noor Ali, already operates major global hotel brands in Bangladesh, including The Westin Dhaka, Sheraton Dhaka, and Hansa. With four more five-star hotels in the pipeline, the company is a leading player in the hospitality sector. Hossain believes that the government must involve industry leaders like Noor Ali, along with other tourism professionals, to make cricket tourism a success.

"The government cannot depend solely on bureaucrats to implement a specialized concept like this. Expert knowledge is required. For the first time ever, Bangladesh has a cricket tourism adviser, and I bring both academic and practical experience to the table. I teach at Dhaka University, I've completed my MPhil, and I am pursuing a PhD, while also working in the hospitality industry. People like me should be utilized," Hossain asserted.



Cox's Bazar International Airport has high potential to boost cricket tourism in Bangladesh

Bureaucratic delays a major barrier

However, the path forward has not been smooth. The Bangladesh Tourism Board has already sent the cricket tourism proposal to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism for vetting. However, no concrete response has yet been received.

"It is unfortunate that we are stuck in a bureaucratic loop," Hossain lamented. "If it takes this long just to sign an MoU, how long will actual implementation take? This is a systemic problem in our country. Bureaucrats alone cannot pull off projects like this. The government must empower experts and move quickly to capitalize on opportunities."

A new era for tourism, cricket

Despite the challenges, Hossain remains optimistic. He believes cricket tourism could transform Bangladesh's image abroad, while boosting domestic tourism and creating jobs across sectors. From stadium matches and festivals to cultural events and food diplomacy, the initiative has the potential to generate nationwide participation and international attention.

"Our people are enthusiastic about sports, especially cricket. With the right planning and collaboration, cricket tourism can become one of Bangladesh's strongest tools for promoting its destinations and hospitality industry," Hossain concluded.