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Analyzing tourism and hospitality management in Bangladesh

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The popularity of Hospitality and Tourism Management courses are attributable to the expanding tourism and hospitality market of Bangladesh. The very recent advent and proliferation of many certificate courses offered by institutions, and 'Bachelor' and 'Post grad' degrees conferred by universities can be attributed to the demand placed by the

hospitality and tourism industry of Middle-East and other developed countries(where such skills are in high demand) and also the immigration scene. In Bangladesh as far as universities go, undergraduate programs in this discipline have been introduced by the private universities.

Certificate courses in the various tributaries of the ‘Tourism and Hospitality Management’ discipline have been in vogue for quite a few years. Such courses were originally introduced by the Bangladesh Government’s tourism wing: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation in the late ‘80s. Following their lead, many more private sector institutes brought about similar ‘Certificate Courses’ and training programs; often in conjunction with more resourceful foreign institutes or universities. From the beginning of year 2000 these previous developments gave way to a bunch of nascent (but full-fledged) university courses broadly categorized under the ‘Hospitality and Tourism Management’ banner. These courses were invariably offered by public and private universities of Bangladesh such as Dhaka University, AIUB, Presidency University, IUBAT, Victoria University, People’s University, IBAIS, Shanta Marium etc. Along with these universities, Institute of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management and Advanced Hotel Management Institute (AHMI) are three privately run institutions that offer various certificate and diploma courses in selected areas of hospitality management. Dhaka has many such small institutes sprouting up and capturing students who are interested in this field. These unaccounted numbers of institutes are growing and indicate a positive trend towards capacity development in this sector. But most of the universities and institutions’ faculty members do not have rigorous academic exposure (i.e. not having a Masters or a PhD in the relevant discipline) that are required in the ordinary sense. Often long experience in five star hotels of Dhaka or having served in the ‘Parjatan Corporation’ of Bangladesh government are substituted for formal training and exposure in the academic side of the discipline. Since public and private universities are offering relevant courses (e.g., diploma, undergrad and post grad), the graduates have minimum certifications but the opportunities for significant skill development and practical exposure is inadequate in this sector.

The demands for these programs are driven by the expanding tourism and hospitality industry of Bangladesh as well as the employment and immigration opportunities that these qualifications can open up to the graduates. In the last five years a number of five star hospitality properties (i.e. five star hotels) in Bangladesh have been added, culminating in widening the scope of employment and career progression in this field. In tandem domestic tourism have increased and resort cities like Cox's Bazaar and Kuakata have received a lot of attention in the form of investment and media coverage. Heritage sites like Sundarbans, Rangamati and St. Martin are more popular now to the domestic and international tourism clientele than any other time in the history of the country. Sundarbans' nomination as the new Seven Wonders of the World is a testament to that. These have led to investments in resorts, hotels and tourism programs. Skilled management and labor needed to service this burgeoning sector can be supplied by the universities and institutes as they get more involved in capacity building by offering formal education and training. Lack of skilled manpower in this field has resulted in hiring/employing professionals at a premium. For example, minimum salary of a Pastry Chef in a three star hotel of Dhaka is not less than Taka 70,000 and can be as high as Taka 200,000.

Countries like Australia, Canada and Britain where a very large Bangladeshi diaspora is present, have immigration rules and policies that welcome hospitality professionals. Qualifications that are conferred by these institutes and universities have been effectively used to gain immigration to such countries. As a result, a large number of students enroll in the programs with an express intention of attaining immigration through these degrees.

The hotels and tourist districts of the Middle East are an active employer of Bangladeshi trained professionals. Many have obtained employment at various Middle Eastern countries with professional qualifications and experience earned in Bangladesh.

This is also applicable for Bangladeshi hospitality industry professionals aiming to get employment in the U.K., where a very large number of Bangladeshi restaurants operate.

Analysis of the current situation based on existing inquiry concludes that there is a gap in the education and capacity development side of the 'Tourism and Hospitality Management' field. The programs were in many cases conjured up on ad-hoc basis without proper input, endowment and assistance from experienced and well reputed institutions in this field. Serious lacks of academic professionals exist apparently as no discipline headed by an academic with the appropriate qualifications was found. The new fangled thrust of the discipline which addresses eco-tourism, experiential tourism and heritage tourism seemed to be totally ignored or unrecognized by these universities. The demand for courses and degrees as evidenced by student interest in programs and the increasing number of new institutes lends strength to the assumption that any properly designed degree program with the right support and international/world-class standard pedagogy will be well received by aspiring hospitality professionals.

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