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Fairs and Festivals as Tourist Attractions: Bangladesh Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Fairs and festivals are significant parts of culture of every society. Fairs and festivals have drawn attention of operators, destination marketers, tourists and other stakeholders. There is a complex relationship between fairs and festivals with tourism, which is not focused in regular tourism activities in Bangladesh. But based on these fairs and festivals based tourism, Bangladesh can expose its culture among the tourists of the world. The paper attempts to highlight the outcomes of this relationship between fairs and festivals related tourism and the country development as well as identify the problems and likelihood of expansion of these types of tourism in Bangladesh. The outcome of the findings from this research will help stakeholders to get a clear idea on the difference between fairs and festivals and their relation with tourism. 80 percent of the respondents agreed that there is a relationship of fairs and festivals with tourism and 100 percent respondents thought that fairs and festivals have impacts on the economy and the society. As such, it is imperative that fairs and festivals can be considered as important tourist attractions of Bangladesh tourism industry.

Keywords: Prospects, Fair and festivals, Tourism attraction, and Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION:

People primarily take tours to see new things and places. “But they also include the purposes of experiencing new people, their cultures, customs, and traditions and further their celebrations. Thus local fairs and festivals add to experiencing the unique and memorable experiences with the travelers’ purposes (<https://www.linkedin.com/advice/0/>)”. Fairs and festivals are now common and regular events in almost all the societies and cultures. The essentials of these events are on-going customs and traditions of the society and of the past and the future as well. Many of the customs and traditions are related with local agriculture, business, economy and life style of local people. Besides, fairs and festivals events largely

depend on the past and on-going natural, social, cultural, economic, and climatic conditions, traditions and structures of the society concerned. People of a society celebrate their faiths, rituals, traditions, customs, liberty, glories, and other joyful activities throughout the year by means of various fairs and festivals, and arrange those events with relentless joys, eagerness and efforts (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017).

Organizers of fairs and festivals use some cultural themes, traditions and glories of the society that help them attract people from other areas, and thus build cultural image of their own society. These Fairs and festivals along with necessary and proper facilities,

amenities and security measures, can easily be transformed into good tourism resources and products (<https://www.daily-sun.com> November 11, 2019). Bangladesh is known as a country of colorful lives expressed through fairs and festivals which are arranged with great passion and enthusiasm throughout the year. Though certain of the fairs and festivals of the country are based on religious beliefs but most of these are spontaneous and secular in nature. All colorful and glorious fairs and festivals here are intensely rooted in Bengali core culture based on their rituals, social practices, customs and traditions. Thus, fairs and festivals have important impacts on the communities' lives and economy resulting in the expansion of cultural tourism in Bangladesh. Visiting tourists can see the authentic culture and heritage firsthand of a country demonstrated to them by the fairs and festivals (<https://www.daily-sun.com>, April 11, 2023).

The research problem

The present research has attempted to understand the concepts 'fairs and festivals' and to know how these events work as tourist resources, attract tourists, contribute to enhance the economy, provide jobs to local people, support the cultural groups and organizations, enhance the local cultural fabric, develop the image of the areas as destination, and enhance the quality of peoples' lives. Since these are many important tourist products and resources which contribute a lot to entertain tourists, these deserve special attentions of tourism planners, government, stakeholders, operators, researchers, academics, and the community at large. Though Bangladesh has many colourful fairs, festivals and events throughout the year, these are not promoted as tourist attractions and these do not attract any tourists in Bangladesh. There has not been even any research on the problems and prospects of fairs and festivals based tourism programs in Bangladesh to identify the reasons for not promoting these as tourist resources and attracting tourists there. As such, this study deserves attention of the present researchers to explore the problems and potentials of this type of tourism in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

The broader objective of this research is to explore how fairs and festivals can work as tourism attractions UniversePG | www.universepg.com

and enrich tourism business in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are outlined below:

1. To identify the role of fairs and festivals in the advancement of tourism in a destination country;
2. to present some popular types fairs and festivals held in the country and analyze their nature; and
3. to identify the impacts of fairs and festivals based tourism on the society and economy of Bangladesh; to identify the problems and prospects of fairs and festivals related tourism and suggest some practical guidelines to help develop this type of tourism in Bangladesh.

Rationale of the study

Fairs and festivals are playing very basic and vital roles in tourism development of many destination countries. Being fairs and festivals an important part of our cultures, these may work positively in the promotion and enhancement of our tourism as well. These thus should also work as sources of our social, cultural and economic development. Bangladeshi fairs and festivals have a long history of more than 2000 years (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017). Though there are many fairs and festivals arranged in the country throughout the year, these are not at all helping our tourism development. As there has not been conducted any research on the problems and prospects of fairs and festivals based tourism in Bangladesh, there also lacks literatures on this type of tourism in Bangladesh. As such, the researchers have chosen this topic for study and explore the problems and dreams of fair and festivals tourism in Bangladesh. The findings will help formulate necessary policy by the concerned government authorities and apply the same by the operators in Bangladesh.

Review of Literature

Hausold, (2010) commented that festivals are unique, joyous, and exciting for life; these create prime opportunities for tourists, generate positive media coverage, and boost the local community. To him, festivals carry a good impact on tourism in terms of three spheres which include attracting tourists, developing the destination image, and sustaining the community. Çelik and Çetinkaya, (2013) described Fairs and festivals as events which are special tourism concepts contributing to the enhancement of the

tourism sector and providing sustainable benefits for the destination and community. To them these important factors generate tourism demand for both of local and foreign tourists. These again help present local history and unique cultures of the destination society, exchange cultures among the participants, and thus build destination image. Sharma *et al.* (2013) finds that fairs and festivals are central tourism attractions these days. As such, they emphasized that promotion of these events will help attract more tourists and give benefits to the state's economy. Sen (2014) stated that a close positive relationship exists between festivals and culture. To her, festivals are a great anchor for attracting tourists. She mentioned with reference to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) that an estimate of over 40% of all global tourists is 'cultural tourists'. To her, fairs and festivals are currently arranged with the intention of promoting them as tourism products. Zakaria, (2015) stated that fairs/melas are ancient origins and the present concept of fair/mela adds a lot of activities time to time. Howlader's, (2019) newspaper article mentions that fairs and festivals are the significant entertainment events of every nation. To him, these fairs and festivals mean enjoyments, cultural demonstration, get together, exhibition and conservation. Dychkovskyy and Ivanov, (2020) said fairs and festivals as a form of local destination marketing, a means of stimulating creativity, a way of economic enhancement, and a form achieving many socio-cultural objectives. Sahoo and B G, (2020) stated that fairs and festivals help add considerably to the economic, social and cultural enhancement of destinations.

To them, the fairs and festivals have huge effects on the expansion of cultural tourism in the community areas. As such, the organizers associate with some historical and cultural themes to expand fairs and festivals types of events; to draw guests; and generate cultural reflection of the host areas by arranging them in the neighborhood and community settings. Shee, (2020) points out that fairs and festivals have huge potentials to attract many domestic and foreign tourists. Shee also mentions that these events play an essential role in the enhancement of economic situations of the local residents and its surrounding areas by reducing economic disparity, creating

employment opportunities, and enhancing the cultural values. Richards and Fernandes, (2022) mentioned that many destinations are now adopting strategies to the development of events and programs to position their destinations as 'eventful places' which help them attract more visitors, sharpen and develop their cultures, build destination image and work as a catalyst for areas regeneration. But research work on fairs and festivals in the context of Bangladesh is very limited. Therefore, the present researchers have attempted to conduct an exploratory research on this topic. An in-depth conceptual analysis has been done throughout the paper by the researchers.

METHODOLOGY:

Research design

This research applied a conceptual and theoretical research design. This type of research design is scientific as it has described the situations under an exploratory research. 'Survey Method' has been used for data collection. Here, respondent participants have answered the questions on a pre-designed questionnaire. The responses on the questionnaire have been described and analyzed conceptually in details.

Target population

A target population is the total individuals from whom the sample is drawn. The target population included those having experience and knowledge on fairs and festivals based tourism. Besides, aged people and tourism experts who got experience on this type of activity have been counted as target population.

Sample and its selection procedure

A total of 50 respondents were included as the sample on which the researchers conducted their survey. The sample respondents were selected purposively having experience in visiting fair and festivals tourism and knowledge on this type of tourism. They are selected based on convenience of and accessibility to the researchers.

Questionnaire preparation

The questionnaire included some simple open ended questions to seek respondent's opinion. It consisted of the questions to obtain their perceptions on the problems, potentials and solutions of fairs and festivals tourism activities in Bangladesh.

Data collection

Direct face to face questioning was done to collect data from the respondents. The respondents did not face any difficulty in understanding the items included in the questionnaires. Secondary information have also been gathered from different unpublished and published sources like research reports/papers, newspaper articles, and websites articles.

Data analysis

The data were coded, computed, and analyzed using simple statistics like mean and percentage according to the objectives of the study. All data were analyzed in a way to help find out the perceived perceptions of the respondents on the overall arrangements of fairs and festivals programs and activities in the country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Fairs and festivals in Bangladesh

Fairs and festivals are special events of any society. “A fair is basically an economic event or temporary market in an area. A festival celebrates a special holiday occasion or an event (<https://www.encyclopedia.com>).”. Fairs and festivals provide local and faraway visitors to interact irrespective of region and social classes; present the local cultures to the visitors; build relationships among different sections of people in the society; marketing and shopping opportunities of locally produced items; enjoy different events; and learn local customs and traditions by the visitors. An uncountable number of fairs and festivals are held round the year in Bangladesh. Some of them are described below in brief:

Fairs

“Fair/Mela is a Sanskrit word which means ‘gathering’ or ‘to meet together’ in a place or in an area. All types and sizes of gatherings like religious, cultural, agricultural, commercial, entertainment, or even sport-related are included here. People of all ages like men, women and children gather in a place at a certain point of time (Wikipedia, 2021)”. The essence of a fair is temporary with scheduled times. A fair may be major event attracting local and regional buyers and sellers – occasionally even from other countries (<https://www.encyclopedia.com>). In Bangladesh, fairs/melas are common and regular with multiple purposes of agriculture, religions, marketing, culture, sports, rides

and other entertainments. Fairs are also organized on religious grounds and flavours. Bangladeshi fairs are rich in colors, smells, glories, traditions and heritages. Earlier, fairs were local place-based; but it is now held both in local or metropolitan areas (Zakaria, 2015). Researchers have categorized fairs held in Bangladesh into the following different broad and common types and these are discussed in details as under:

Religious fairs

People of all religions like Muslims, other religious groups and ethnic sections of people organize religious fairs on some situations. The Hindus of Bangladesh holds fairs during their important religious occasions like Durga-puja, Kali-puja, Shiv-puja, Ratha-jatra, Dol-jatra, Janmastami, etc. The Muslims organize Moharram fairs on the first half the Islamic month of Moharram to memorize of the death of Hazrat Imam Hossain (R) in the Karbala (Zakaria, 2015). The occasion of Moharram is basically relevant with the Shias, but now the Sunnis in Bangladesh also participate on this occasion. Rash Mela is held every year at Dublar Char in Sundarbans on the day of full moon in the Bangla month of Kartik. It is celebrated in honor of Lord Krishna and his eternal love for Sri Radhika.

Cultural fairs

Many colourful and glorious cultural fairs are organized in Bangladesh. Some fairs are arranged throughout the country every year in observance of the national days like Language Martyrs Day on the 21st February, the Independence Day on the 26th March, and the Victory Day on the 16th December. “Amor Ekushey February is celebrated centrally and locally each year throughout the country on the 21st February to pay respects to the language martyrs in 1952 for establishing the right of our mother language, Bangla, as state language. Laying of floral wreaths at central and local Shahid Minar, offering special prayers for the martyrs, arranging discussion meetings and cultural functions are the main events of this day. The month-long Ekushey Book-Fair is held on Bangla Academy ground. It has now become a heritage and cultural sprit of Bangladesh. The UNESCO has declared this Day in 1999 as the International Mother Language Day. Now this Day is observed regularly throughout the globe to support the significance of all

mother languages of the world (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017).”. Bangladesh observes 26th March as the Independence Day with due nationalistic fervor to commemorate the pronouncement of independence of the country by our father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in the belated hours of 25th March of 1971 (Ibid). Bangladesh also observes the Victory Day on the 16th December every year. The way of observation of the Victory Day is nearly alike to that of Independence Day (Ibid). Two Lalon Melas are held every year at the Lalon Akhra in Kushtia, one on the death anniversary of Lalon Shah and another one is on the Dol-Purnima. The entire place is decorated with lights and colours on this occasion. Bauls and devotees of the philosopher Lalon from both home and abroad gather here to accomplish and draw attention to the mystics of Fakir Lalon Shah (Ibid).

Seasonal fairs

In seasonal fairs, Baishakhi Mela is the biggest colorful event held in Bangladesh which welcomes Bangla New Year. It provides entertainment facilities like traditional and folk music, Jatra Pala, traditional dance, classical music, rides, etc. “Celebrating Pohela Boishakh has become an integral part of Bengali cultural heritage. Sale of various agricultural products, traditional handicrafts, toys, sweetmeats and other food-items has added new dimensions to this fair (Ibid)”. The Mughal Emperor Akbar first introduced this mela in the Indian Sub-continent to facilitate tax collection from the farmers. The University of Dhaka has introduced ‘Mongol Shova Jatra’ on this this day few years back. The UNESCO has declared this Mongol Shova Jatra as a cultural heritage of humanity (Wikipedia, 2021). Ashwin Sankranti fair is held on the first three days of the Bangla Month Ashwin since 200 years back in the village Khulshi of Durgapur Upazila in Rajshahi district. A traditional Poush Mela is arranged in the Bangla Month of Poush with Jatrapala, music concert, traditional dance, and rice-milk-molasses based delicious cakes (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017).

Organizational fairs, festivals and exhibitions

Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Bangladesh Tourism Board, UniversePG | www.universepg.com

Bangla Academy and Bangladesh Folk Arts Foundation have further added new magnitudes in the arrangement of fairs, festivals and exhibitions (<http://www.mincom.gov.bd>, 2021). Baishakhi fair is locally arranged by the local elites, local government officials, and elected representatives. “An international trade fair named ‘Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF)’ is organized every year at Dhaka by the Ministry of Commerce and Export Promotion Bureau. It starts at the beginning of January and ends with 31st January every year. Many local and foreign companies of the world participate in this fair (Wikipedia, 2015).”

Festivals

“Festivals aim at providing high quality joint entertainments with leisure experience for the participants, focusing on a topic, arranged more or less on regularity with other programs like sports, carnival, art, and local foods (Hungarian Festival Association, 2009).” Sen presents the comments of Arun Srivastava in his article that “The festivals and events have changed with the passage of time. Earlier, festivals and events were related with scheduled time, allied particularly to specific seasons and heritage places. Today, there is a broad type of festivals and events arranged throughout the year (Gibson *et al.*, 2011).”. “Festivals include events, programs, rallies, village fairs, trade fairs, seminars, sports, and cultural performance. These have various types and sizes, specific themes and are held in an area in a particular scheduled times, and these thus can attract tourists (Lian, 2004).” Bangladesh is a country of festivals and people here are by nature festive. The adage ‘Baro Mashe Tero Parbon’ means ‘Thirteen Festivals in Twelve Months’ which implies that Bangladesh is a country of fairs and festivals (Howlader, 2019). Many colourful and eventful festivals are held in Bangladesh round the year. Some festivals and traditions are of prehistoric days, while others have been introduced recently (<http://www.nbcac.org/culture-and-traditions/>). Different festivals in Bangladesh are discussed as under:

Bangladesh has six seasons with distinctive natural colours and cultural representations. Seasonal festivals here mainly include Basanta Utsab, Nabanna Utsob, Chaitra Sankranti (last day of Bengali year) and Pahela Boishakh (1st day of Bangla Year). On the first day of

the spring season, people here celebrate Basanta Utsab throughout the country in a colourful manner wearing colourful dresses and arranging colourful cultural programs (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017). The new harvest festival called Nabanna Utsob is celebrated by the rural farmers in Bangladesh during the first month of Poush (Ibid). Many of the native mores and festivals conserved and nurtured with the passage of time are mostly based on agricultural practices (<http://www.nbcac.org/culture-and-traditions/>). Besides, traditional Birth Day Ceremony, Marriage/Wedding Day Ceremony, and Death Anniversary are also celebrated in distinct ways and flavors with each section of people marking their own unique ways of traditions. Bangladeshi people perform their wedding programs through different ceremonials and rituals involving friends, relations, neighbours of the bride and groom along with the whole community (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017). Religion again plays a vital role in shaping the festivals of Bangladeshi people. Spiritual festivals offer ease feeling for the afterlife suggesting the meaning and the consolation of the human life (<https://www.encyclopedia.com>). Bangladeshi Muslim people observe many cheerful events of the two Eids, Shab-e-Qadr, Shab-e-Barat, etc. “Their biggest festival is Eid-ul-Fitr which is observed with due solemnity and fervour in Bangladesh. On the Eid-ul-Fitr day, Muslims dress with new clothes and they visit relatives’ houses to exchange good wishes, greetings and solidarity. The second joyous festival of Bangladesh Muslims is Eid ul-Adha which is more or less similar to that of Eid-ul-Fitr. The main difference is the sacrifice of animals to remember the historic sacrifice of Hazrat Ibrahim (A) symbolizing the greatest devotion and total submission to Allah (Embassy of Bangladesh, Beijing, China, 2017).”

Durga Puja, Kali Puja and Janmastami are the main celebration of the Hindu communities in Bangladesh. Buddho Purnima and the Christmas day are the famous religious festivals of the Buddhist and the Christian communities respectively. Kite festival is held at old Dhaka on 14th Poush every year. In the afternoon, people gather with their kites and they fly their kites high. Everybody attempts to snatch other’s kite on a friendly competition.

Linking fairs and festivals with tourism

Fair and festival tourism creates multiple impacts on tourism. These types of events play a very important role in developing cultural tourism by attracting many tourists, extending the tourism season, and increasing tourists’ satisfaction (<https://typeset.io/>). These motivate many people from many areas to travel to destinations (Sharma, 2013). The strategic placement of fairs and festivals helps enlarge tourism season (Getz, 1997). “Fairs and festivals create prime opportunities like economic benefits to locals, quality of life of both tourists and hosts, and social solidarity among the local community. These also help communities understand the real meaning and spirit of the place by the participant visitors. During the events, visitors find unique opportunity to mingle with local people and gain thorough experiences on the local customs, traditions and culture (Sahoo and B G, 2020).” “Fairs and festivals attract many visitors from diverse regions and countries. Thus, fairs and festivals have incredible tourism potentials (Shee, 2020).” Fairs and festivals are fast-growing segment of the market serving as a powerful tool to attract tourists from both home and abroad especially during the off-season. These also help create destination image and awareness. As such, fairs and festivals are treated as important tourism resources for the given area. Considering the nature and characteristics of fairs and festivals, the author believes that these should be treated as a distinctive and special type of tourism. Public events are also arranged in fairs and festival tourism. These are thus basic parts of our culture and tradition (Howlader, 2019). Though the majority of events in Bangladesh are tourism driven, the country has failed to pay any attention to the tourists to appeal and exploit their potentials.

Development of cultural tourism through fairs and festivals

Fairs and festivals are vital part of culture. Fairs and festivals represent the culture and tradition of the community to the outsiders. As such, these events play important role especially in community culture. These are also attractive to host communities, because these help present and share their culture among tourists, develop their pride on local culture, glorify their identity, create a sense of value, build good image of

the area, create economic impact in the local society, develop tourist attractions and its activities, overcome seasonality problems, contribute to community and businesses development, and support the key cottage industries. These again have effects in destination planning, getting government supports, creating bondage with communities, and linking tourism with business. Organizers of these events are now using local cultural themes, spirits, and glories in their programs within the community's cultural settings to create cultural image and goodwill of the areas. Fairs and festivals further provide tourists the opportunity to mingle and interact with locals, enjoy how the local people have fun with their culture, take pleasure in the events, and thus meet their leisure needs. Thus these fairs and festivals offer the guests with enjoyments and experiences in a lively and precious local culture, values, costumes, customs and traditions. These again support the locals pursuing monetary benefits from sharing neighbourhood culture to others. Culture-based tourism can be improved through the arrangement of fairs and festivals (UNEP, 2002). These thus add to the strength of community in diverse ways. Fairs, festivals and events, where local residents are the primary participants and visitors are the secondary participants, often revive, re-new and develop vigour in response to interests and needs of both of the two groups. "Fairs and festivals in Bangladesh are deeply rooted in our culture, religions, and social and day to day lives of the common people. As such, 'Bangladesh Tourism Policy-2010' and 'Cultural Policy' of the country have put proper emphasis on the promotion of country's cultural tourism, highlighting fairs and festivals as the prominent part of our cultural activities (Howlader, 2019)."

Socio-economic roles of fairs and festivals

Fairs and festivals based tourism helps tourists escape from day-to-day routine life, get enjoyment, learn destination culture, meet with local people, buy authentic local products, and thus make socialization. Local people also enjoy the program, sell their products, earn money, improve their standard of living, interact with visitors, and make socialization. As the hosts and other general people are the beneficiaries, their socio-economic conditions improve

to a greater extent (Ibid). The socio-economic roles of fairs and festivals are discussed below:

Enhance the local economy

Fairs and festivals help boost the local economy especially in the off-peak tourism season. "Their role is awfully imperative for the development and enhancement of economic conditions of the local people. These are very helpful to reduce economic disparity through income and employment generation (Shee, 2020)." Visitors spend money in the fair and festival sites, which boosts the local economy (Grames and Vitcenda, 2012). They spend on admission fees, parking fees, transports, hotels, restaurants, beverages, souvenirs, rides, entertainments and other allied services. These have primary impacts which are direct on the earnings, employment generations, increase of standard of living of the locals, and an increase of business and profits. The secondary impacts of the expenditure create linkages with other sectors of the economy. Their economic benefits are easier to see as these help expand tourism and other local businesses in the region (Grames; Lewis and Sears, 2016). The initial injection of spending on the fairs, festivals and hospitality industries is seen but eventually it affects positively the other sectors of the economy (Wvutoday Archive, 2015). This secondary impact is called the ripple effects which are measured by the multiplier impacts. Through this process fair and festival tourism creates jobs in the primary and secondary sectors. Thus, the total impacts of fair and festival tourism become much higher than the initial spending.

Earning foreign currencies

Foreign currency is vital for Bangladesh to meet her importation needs, grow the economy, and continue its development works. Fairs and festivals are special interest tourism (Weiler and Hall, 1992) which will promote our destination, attracts foreign tourists, and enhance foreign exchange earnings. If this tourism contains inherent cultural values and if it can be promoted among foreign tourists, many of them will participate there and buy many local goods. This will thus help enhance our foreign currencies earnings. If fair and festival tourism can attract a good numbers of local and foreign tourists, this will be of immense importance for our economy in general and for the tourism industry in particular.

Enhance social integrity

Fairs and festivals help develop social integrity, harmony, and solidarity. “Well-managed fairs and festivals offer lot of social benefits to the community. The social paybacks of fairs and festivals may be less noticeable or may not be measured but they are significant for the society and the economy (Lewis & Sears, 2016; and Grames, Eliza and Vitcenda, 2012)”. To modern historians, some fairs and festivals reinforce the existing and established order of the society. Religious, civic and other fairs and festivals show the social order (Social-sciences-and-law/-21). These fairs, festivals, public events, performances, and tournaments promote the idea of social unity, create bondage among the different social classes, and make people feel safe and comfortable within them (Encyclopedia.com).

Foster social relationships

Howlader, (2019) mentioned with reference to encyclopedia that fairs and festivals are special events offering a chance to interact with people of other regions and social classes. “These create stronger relationships among communities. From the planning of fairs and festivals, organizers interact among themselves, community leaders, and general masses of the locality; and thus form opinions of local people in favour of holding fairs and festivals. These create and strengthen bonds and build relationships with different organizations, local administration, local elected representatives, volunteers, sponsors and other interested residents (Grames, Eliza and Vitcenda, 2012).” “The benefit of this relationship is to help arrange fairs and festivals effectively. Even after the event is over, it helps improve and make a healthy community. This bondage could be termed as the “glue” to keep communities united and this glue is called social capital (Ibid).” Thus, these fairs and festivals are treated as a significant task to enhance the life of the common people in Bangladesh (Howlader, 2019).

Fostering community pride

Arrangement of fairs and festivals involves the community to yield a number of social benefits. According to Ingrid Schneider, tourism creates chances to stay communities in a group and encourage the sense of host community’s pleasure and familiarity of their past history (Grames, Eliza and Vitcenda, UniversePG | www.universepg.com

2012). “To Chris Ramano (a business consultant) and Thrivent, the best thing of arranging festivals is to create opportunities to make a neighborhood, encourage a sense of community pride, and engage in community issues. These again promote neighborhood pride and good feelings by arranging things that make a locality special (Ibid).”. Hosts are flattered by the visitors which enhance the residents’ pride and promote them to preserve and cultivate the local culture (Sahoo and BG, 2020). Doug Arbogast says, “There are huge community prides in the arrangement of fairs and festivals; it is a noble way to attract tourists and offer them services that are not always provided throughout the year. It creates consciousness of what they can provide – in the course of a community endeavor – and people of the society can feel proud of their communities (Wvutoday Archive, 2015).”

Learning new things

“Whatever the type of fairs and festivals and where visitors participate, these become instructional for visitors to learn from those. Thus education, awareness building, and knowledge gathering are other social benefits of fairs and festivals. This knowledge cannot be learnt from books or from a classroom teaching - this is treated as an experiential education obtainable in the entertaining framework of commemoration. It is logical to utter that fairs and festivals advance community delight, educate public the new things, and make stronger the relationships (Grames, Eliza and Vitcenda, 2012).” This learning from fairs and festivals tourism can then be applied to other areas of operation to fulfill other objectives.

Value of training

Management of fairs and festivals includes some important tasks like effective planning, event management, site management, sanctioning budget and financial control, sponsorship collection, strategy development, human resources deployment and their management, volunteer appointment, and finally event evaluation (Ibid). Locals are trained in organizing, managing and controlling of events. Shari Kunza said that fair and festival events help expand knowledge, creative thinking, and their successful implementation (Ibid).

Enhance destination image

Fairs and festivals not only attract tourists, but also many media personnel and opinion leaders. Successful fairs and festivals generate news stories for media. So, fair and festival events are called 'media events'. "Such media events create a window for positive media coverage and expand the place image. As part of getting ready for fairs and festivals, places also prepare for the expected media attention (Sahoo and BG, 2020; Hossain MM., 2020).

Full time employment

Fair and festival events play a vital role in job creation for the community (Vivers, 2010). 70% of the community people agreed that these events are very important in Bangladesh. 20% of the respondents did not reply at all. The remaining 10% respondents said we do not know about its importance. But all the respondents said that fairs and festivals are important part of their culture. These also help extend the seasonality of tourism in a region which again helps distribute the flow of money injected into a region evenly, thus increasing the opportunities for full time employment.

Prospects of fairs and festivals tourism in Bangladesh

The fair and festival based tourism has now experienced the rapid growth phenomenon in the world of tourism (Getz, 1991). Some fairs and festivals have become renowned and treated as tourism products (Chowdhary, 2017). Successful fairs and festivals create a positive image and help brand of destinations. These help attract more visitors in the off-peak periods, work as catalysts for development of other sectors, develop infrastructure, increase capacity of destinations, and foster a positive destination image. "The potentials of fairs and festivals in delivering series of advancement in terms of economic outcomes, renewal of tourism, destination reposition, internal and foreign investment, and revenue earnings. It plays a very good role to integrate regional tourism resources and enhance the fame of destinations. As such, the public agencies have become increasingly vigorous in supporting and organizing fairs and festivals (Sahoo and BG, 2020)." Destination development, business development, increase of local standard of living, and other destination goals depend upon the promotion and

successful arrangement of fairs and festivals. Bangladesh has bright prospects of fair and festival based tourism. As the country has many types of fairs and festivals with cultural, social, agricultural, religious and seasonal flavours, it should proceed to develop these types of tourism. This will help mobilize resources, create job opportunities, earn foreign money, create a good destination image, and build a good relationship between the hosts and tourists.

Limitations of fairs and festivals tourism in Bangladesh

The limitations of fairs and festivals based tourism in Bangladesh are identified shown under:

Harms the local environment

Tourism, more or less, affects the environment. Fair and festival tourism generates solid waste, damages the ecology, reduces architectural lands, destroys hills and heritage sites, and creates crowds, congestion, pollution, alcoholism, prostitution, sound pollution, etc. Promoting successful fairs and festivals may also create conflict and competition among different areas of the region and require huge costs for removal of litters and maintenance of law and order.

Lack of effective promotional strategy

Tourists are not attracted in the fairs and festivals of Bangladesh due to the lack of promotional campaign. Tour operators in Bangladesh are small in size having limited ability to promote the market. They simply publish and distribute some folders, brochures, and leaflets. These are not much effective and properly distributed to promote tourists and visit fairs and festivals in Bangladesh.

Increases the crime rate

Unethical practices may prevail during the fair and festival time. This is especially true for a country like Bangladesh. Eve teasing, gambling and prostitutions may spread in the society. Racial problems and tensions during the periods of earlier governments were rampant in Bangladesh. Of course, these problems are now under control and have now come down in Bangladesh.

Lack of security in the rural areas

Security is a common problem of fairs and festivals, especially in rural areas of Bangladesh. This is

especially true for women travelers (Sen, 2014). Robbery, hijacking, pick pocketing, and purse snatching can occur both in urban and rural areas. “Experts consider fairs and festivals to undermine the conventional array of society by guiding people on physical amusements rather than on logic and morality (Ibid)”.

Commercialization of culture

Culture is the property of the local people of all societies. Here in fairs and festivals, culture is presented as commodity for the enjoyment of tourists for money making. Transformation of culture as commodity may result in distortion. As such, culture may lose its inherent meaning, value and dignity to the local people.

May happen inflation

Tourism influences local inflation. It enhances prices of major consumer items, transport fares, land prices, house rents, etc imposing taxes on the locals. Increase of prices of common items in and around fairs and festivals impose extra burdens for the local citizens. Economists call this extra burden as tax. Prices of items in the fairs and festivals increase due to over demand which also results in inflation.

Earning of poor reputation

Due lack of facilities and amenities, improper practices, poor management of the event and inflated prices of major items, poor reputation may be generated of the locality. Misunderstanding happens between hosts and visitors creating hostility towards each other. Operators may not satisfy the guests due to lack of education, training, and knowledgeable. Fairs and festivals also pose other challenges like risks and expenses connected with them.

Lack of private investment

Investment of private entrepreneurs in the tourism sector of the country is still inadequate. The government is trying to encourage them to invest in tourism projects for the advancement of tourism facilities and to support the country’s tourism. Our investors do not yet consider tourism as a profitable sector for investment. The uncertainty about the return on investment influences the private financiers negatively.

Suggestions for improvement

The researchers suggest the organizers of fairs and festivals should understand visitors’ needs and develop their products and facilities accordingly. “Because different visitors have different choices, purposes and preferences. Some prefer to learn and actively participate in activities, while others prefer to observe from a little distance, while others again want to socialize with the locals. (<https://www.linkedin.com/advice/0/>)”. “During these fairs and festivals adequate civic facilities and amenities should be provided for the gathering of people. The hygienic and sanitary conditions of the area have to be maintained to avoid any disease or epidemic (Anshu, 2016).” Facilities and amenities to be developed and provided must ensure comforts of visitors. The authority should train manpower to develop their skills so that they perform all activities in an efficient and better way. Measures should be taken in ensuring safety and security in the destinations and of the attendees so that they feel comfortable in the fairs and festivals held in Bangladesh. The organizers should consider the social and religious sensitivity of both the community and the visitors. For these, the organizers should make both the locals and visitors aware of the proper dress code, behaviour, etiquette, and rituals in the fairs and festivals (<https://www.linkedin.com/advice/0/>). The parties involved in organizing fairs and festivals should create and highlight a feel of the place (Chowdhary, 2017) to make these events successful. Private sector should be encouraged to invest in fairs and festivals tourism events. Incentives like grants, low interest loan and tax holiday can be offered for them. The authority of Bangladesh should make proper strategies which will not only be inclusive of domestic tourism with fairs and festivals rather some should absolutely focus on fairs and festivals (Sharma, 2017). Bangladesh Tourism Board and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation should play a proactive role in promoting fairs and festivals of the country. An integrated marketing campaign should be implemented to attracting both the local and international visitors at the fairs and festivals (Sahoo and BG, 2020). It will also popularize those events and create brand image of Bangladesh as a tourism destination. Publicity in social media can promote fairs and festivals based tourism in Bangladesh (Howlader, 2019). The web

pages of the private operators, Bangladesh Tourism Board and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation need to be well-designed and updated so that they become easily accessible to and user friendly for the tourists. Details about the venues, time schedule, and prices of different packages should be displayed. The government should regulate, monitor and control over commercialization of the local culture. The SDG goal numbers 8.9 and 12.b have noticeably emphasized the protection of regional and local culture, ethnicity, customs and traditions (Ibid). As such, proper measures should be taken to preserve and conserve the fair and festival based cultures and traditions of Bangladesh. Sufficient government supports are necessary in all aspects of implementing these guidelines and developing fair and festival based tourism activities in Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION:

Fairs and festivals have now become a useful tool and an effective means of attracting tourists to many destinations. The main purpose of this research is to evaluate whether fairs and festivals of Bangladesh can be tourism attractions, and, if so, how Bangladesh can utilize these to attract tourists for the development of our tourism, economy and society. It is evident that fairs and festivals are traditions events in Bangladesh. These have become important part of our culture and, hence, important tourism attractions. These thus occupy as a significant part of our cultural tourism. Many countries have already adopted intensive measures and strategies to utilize their fairs and festivals to attract tourists and get success from these types of tourism. Today, fairs and festivals are treated as important tourist attractions in most of the destination countries. Visitors have also accepted these fairs and festivals as part of their cultural tourism activities. These types of tourism can enhance tourism activities in the off peak season as well. Organizers may also find them as new ventures for their business. But it can be regrettably mentioned that Bangladesh is still unaware of the potentials of fairs and festivals as tourism resources. As such, Bangladesh should take immediate and effective measures and adopt necessary strategies to utilize these fairs and festivals in its tourism activities. If the above guidelines are implemented effectively then Bangladesh can exploit a

part of the prospects of well arranged and well managed fairs and festivals based tourism by attracting a reasonable number of tourists and thus enhance its economic and social growth and development.

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M.A.H.; and S.N. conceptualized the study, were responsible for the design, methodology, and data analysis, and completed the writing. They were also involved in the interpretation of data and drafting the manuscript. K.M.; and M.N.M. contributed to data collection. M.A.H.; and M.N.M. provided critical revisions and gave final approval for the version to be published. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The authors believe that there will arise no conflict of interest as the article emerged from an authentic and original research work. Anything borrowed from other articles and research works are rightly cited with proper references.

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