

**BIMSTEC-Japan
Cooperation in Tourism
and Environment
Bangladesh Perspective**

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CSIRD Discussion Paper #27

May 2007



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BIMSTEC-Japan Cooperation in Tourism and Environment: Bangladesh Perspective

Mizan R. Khan* and Mahfuzul Haque**

Abstract: Tourism worldwide including in the BIMSTEC region is an expanding sector. It provides a significant foreign exchange and employment to some BIMSTEC countries. BIMSTEC has potentials to develop tourism as a growing industry. However, according to this paper, the progress in cooperation in the field of tourism in the BIMSTEC region is quite slow. This paper concludes that intra-regional tourism within the BIMSTEC countries need to be enhanced. Following ASEAN, Governments of the BIMSTEC countries should take some bold steps to remove the barriers standing in the way. In this context, Japan with its growing involvement in the BIMSTEC economies can facilitate the process of tourism integration with greater financial and technical assistance.

1. Introduction

The Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand–Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC), established in 1997 and later, with inclusion of Bhutan and Nepal as members, was renamed as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multilateral Scientific, Economic and Technical Cooperation (BIMSTEC). As a fusion of two regions, namely, South and Southeast Asia, BIMSTEC aims to develop a network of complementarities, facilitating greater economic cooperation. To achieve this goal, BIMSTEC started with six areas of cooperation, such as Energy, Fisheries, Technology, Trade and Investment, Transport and Communication and Tourism. In the First Summit held at Bangkok in July 2004, the BIMSTEC leaders agreed to explore expansion of

[The paper is an outcome of the research project entitled “Towards BIMSTEC-Japan Comprehensive Economic Cooperation: Bangladesh Perspective”, undertaken at BIHS, Dhaka, supported by Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF), Tokyo. Views expressed by the authors are their personal. Usual disclaimers apply.]

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cooperation into areas like Protection of Biodiversity, Environment, Biotechnology, Weather and Climate Research and Natural Disaster Management. It is thus evident that the agenda for cooperation is quite elaborate and comprehensive.

The present paper focuses on BIMSTEC-Japan cooperation in tourism and environment, in which the perspective of Bangladesh – how Bangladesh looks at the related issues - will be highlighted. Looking at hindsight, during these last few years, quite a number of meetings including at the ministerial level took place in the field of tourism, but the Action Plan developed for the tourism sector did not move much ahead. Why is there a lack of substantive progress? What are the stakes of Bangladesh? As a minor player in tourism even in the SAARC and BIMSTEC contexts, what are the benefits that Bangladesh expects to derive from such cooperation? What is the stake of Japan in the tourism sector of BIMSTEC countries? What role can Japan play in promoting this sector in BIMSTEC? The present paper attempts to answer aforesaid questions.

Development of any sector including tourism is closely related to environmental sustainability of a country or a region. In fact, environment is crosscutting, having impact on all the areas of the expanded cooperation agenda. It would be a welcome development if environmental aspects are considered in promoting cooperation in any regional cooperation arrangement. This is an area where Japan, the second largest economy in the world, appears to have a better record, compared to other industrial countries. What can BIMSTEC countries learn and benefit from Japan in their efforts to promote economic growth, while maintaining environmental sustainability?

These are the questions the paper intends to deal with. The paper is organized into the following sections. Section 2 deals with global trends in tourism development in the Asia - Pacific region. Importance of the tourism sector in the BIMSTEC and Bangladesh are discussed in Section 3. Current status of cooperation in tourism in the BIMSTEC is analyzed in Section 4. Section 5 highlights experiences of ASEAN, SAARC and SASEC countries in promoting tourism. Analysis of the

tourism sector of Bangladesh is presented in Section 6. Review of environmental conditions in the BIMSTEC countries are briefly discussed in Section 7. Section 8 deals with the role of Japan in the fields of tourism and environment in the BIMSTEC region. Finally, a set of policy recommendations from Bangladesh perspective is provided in Section 9.

2. Global Trends in Tourism Development in the Asia-Pacific Region

The trend of international tourist arrival has been increasing across several parts of the world. Since 1950, when international travel started to become accessible to the general public, tourist activity has grown each year at an average rate of about 7 per cent, thereby increased from 25 million to 808 million in 2005 (WTO). Worldwide receipts for international tourism is presently amounted to US\$ 630 billion per year, corresponding to US\$ 1.7 billion a day, or some US\$ 780 per tourist arrival.

In terms of source markets, international tourism is still relatively concentrated in the industrialized countries of Europe, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific. However, with rising levels of disposable income, many emerging economies have shown fast growth in the last decades, in particular in Northeast and Southeast Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Southern Africa. By far, most international travel takes place within the same region, some four-fifths of the total.

Asia and the Pacific continued its vigorous performance of the past years, with the total number of tourists reaching over 145 million in 2004. International tourism receipts amounted to almost US\$ 128 billion, or US\$ 880 per arrival. The region is profiting from strong intra-regional demand and had not been much affected by the weak economic trends in Japan, traditionally its major generating market. New emerging markets, such as China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore are increasingly taking over the tourism industry of the Asia-Pacific region. Table 1 provides international tourist arrivals across the Asia and Pacific. Northeast Asia, with 8 per cent growth in

Table 1: International Tourist Arrivals by Regions of the Asia and Pacific and Country of Destination

	International Tourist Arrivals ('000)			Market Share in the Region (%)			Change (%)			Average Annual Growth (%)
	1990	2000	2004*	1990	2000	2004*	'03/02	'04*/03	'90-'00	
Asia and Pacific	56,138	111,372	145,491	100	100	100	-9.4	27.4	701	6.9
North-East Asia	26,367	58,276	79,412	47.0	52.3	54.6	-9.6	28.6	8.3	8.0
South-East Asia	21,469	37,763	48,309	38.2	33.9	33.2	-13.6	30.4	5.8	6.4
Myanmar	21	208	242	0.0	0.2	0.2	-5.3	17.7	25.8	3.9
Thailand	5,299	9,579	11,737	9.4	8.6	8.1	-7.3	16.4	6.1	5.2
Oceania	5,152	9,247	10,157	9.2	8.3	7.0	-1.0	12.3	6.2	2.4
South Asia	3,150	6,086	7,613	5.6	5.5	5.2	10.2	18.5	6.8	5.8
Bangladesh	115	199	271	0.2	0.2	0.2	18.0	10.9	5.6	8.1
Bhutan	2	8	9	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.8	47.7	14.3	5.0
India	1,707	2,649	3,457	3.0	2.4	2.4	14.3	26.8	4.5	6.9
Nepal	255	464	385	0.5	0.4	0.3	22.9	13.9	6.2	-4.6
Sri Lanka	298	400	566	0.5	0.4	0.4	27.3	13.1	3.0	9.1

Source: World Tourism Organization (WTO), 2005.

tourist arrivals, led in the sub-region. Southeast and South Asia and Oceania grew at more moderate rates of 6.4 per cent, 5.8 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively in 2004.

One significant development in international tourism is the trend towards regionalization. Thein noted: “Triggered by reduced marketing budgets and tourism downturns, recent trends have shown neighboring countries pooling their financial and human resources, and establishing cost-effective regional joint marketing and promotion programs” (Thein, 2005, p. 5). Asian Development Bank Study (ADB, 2004) provides successful examples include the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA), Regional Tourism Organization for Southern Africa (RETOSA), the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CT) and the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO). A series of regional, sub-regional and national seminars and meetings have been held within the framework of the Plan of Action for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Asian and Pacific Region (1999-2005), launched by the UN Commission at its 55th Session in 1999. These activities were aimed at assisting countries of the region in achieving sustainable growth in tourism by strengthening policy development capabilities and enhancing regional cooperation.

Table 2 shows the per capita receipts from tourism in the BIMSTEC countries. Thailand received US\$ 157 per capita, the highest in the BIMSTEC, followed by Sri Lanka, with US\$ 26. Bangladesh received very little, less than US\$ 0.5 per capita, the lowest in the region.

Future Prospects

Tourism 2020 Vision is the WTO’s long-term forecast and assessment of the development of tourism up to the first 20 years of the new millennium (see, Table 3). An essential outcome of the Vision is quantitative forecasts covering a 25-years period, with 1995 as base year and extends up to 2020. It forecasts that international arrivals are expected to reach over 1.56 billion by the year 2020. Of these worldwide arrivals in 2020, about 1.2 billion will be intra-regional and 377 million will be long-haul travelers.

Table 2: International Tourist Receipts by Regions of the Asia-Pacific and Country of Destination

	International Tourist Receipts (US\$, million)				Market Share in the region (%)			Change (%)		Receipts per arrival (US\$)	Receipts per capita (US\$)
	1990	2000	2004*	1990	2000	2004*	'03/'02	'04*/'03	2004	2004	
Asia and Pacific	46,825	91,259	127,764	100	100	100	-3.6	31.7	880	35	
North-East Asia	23,001	46,028	63,985	49.1	50.4	50.1	-8.9	35.8	805	42	
South-East Asia	14,479	26,188	32,190	30.9	28.7	25.2	-12.7	31.1	665	57	
Myanmar	9	162	84	0.0	0.2	0.1	-53.3	50.0	345	2	
Thailand	4,326	7,483	10,034	9.2	8.2	7.9	-0.6	27.7	855	157	
Oceania	7,316	14,246	22,904	15.6	15.6	17.9	21.4	23.0	2,255	709	
South Asia	2,029	4,797	8,686	4.3	5.3	6.8	24.2	28.8	1,140	6	
Bangladesh	11	50	67	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	17.2	245	0	
Bhutan	2	10	12	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	50.0	1,350	6	
India	1,513	3,460	6,121	3.2	3.8	4.8	43.8	37.1	1,770	6	
Nepal	64	158	230	0.1	0.2	0.2	92.3	15.0	595	8	
Sri Lanka	132	248	513	0.3	0.3	0.4	21.5	16.3	905	26	

Source: World Tourism Organization (WTO), 2005.

Table 3: Projection of International Tourist Arrivals by Region (millions)

	Base Year			Forecasts		Average Annual Growth Rate (%)		Share (%)	
	1995	2010	2020	2010	2020	1995-2020	2020	1995	2020
Total	565.4	1006.4	1561.1			4.1	100	100	100
Africa	20.2	47.0	77.3			5.5	3.6	3.6	5.0
Americas	108.9	190.4	282.3			3.9	19.3	19.3	18.1
East Asia & Pacific	81.4	195.2	397.2			6.5	14.4	14.4	25.4
Europe	338.4	527.3	717.0			3.0	59.8	59.8	45.9
Middle East	12.4	35.9	68.5			7.1	2.2	2.2	4.4
South Asia	4.2	10.6	18.8			6.2	0.7	0.7	1.2
International (a)	464.1	790.9	1,183.3			3.8	82.1	82.1	75.8
Long-Haul (b)	101.3	215.5	377.9			5.4	17.9	17.9	24.2

Notes: a) Intra-regional includes arrivals where country of origin is not specified. b) Long-haul is defined as everything except intra-regional travel.

Source: World Tourism Organization (WTO).

The total tourist arrivals by region shows that by 2020, the top three regions will be Europe (717 million tourists), East Asia and the Pacific (397 million) and the Americas (282 million), followed by Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, the Middle East and Africa are forecasted to record growth of over 5 per cent per year, compared to the world average of 4.1 per cent. Long-haul travel worldwide will grow faster, at 5.4 per cent per year over the period 1995-2020, than intra-regional travel, at 3.8 per cent. Consequently, the ratio between intra-regional and long-haul travel will shift from around 82:18 in 1995 to 76:24 in 2020.

3. Importance of the Tourism Sector in BIMSTEC and Bangladesh

In the BIMSTEC region, tourism has not achieved the same level of development and status as in ASEAN. Tourism business in BIMSTEC region, as measured by yearly tourist arrivals, is small by international standards. With 17 million in 2004 (as shown in Table 1), it constitutes about 2 per cent of world total of over 800 million. This is because tourism business in most of the member countries, with the exception of Thailand and India, is at an early stage of development. Thailand and India account for 70 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively of the total tourist arrivals in the region in 2004. In terms of receipts, BIMSTEC region with US\$ 17,061 million in 2004 accounts for 2.7 per cent of the world's total of US\$ 630,300 million (see, WTO, 2005 and Table 2). Again, Thailand and India were the two leading countries accounting for 64 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively of the total.

During 1985 to 2003, international tourist arrivals to all BIMSTEC countries (with the exception of Bhutan and Myanmar) grew at 5 per cent per year (Thein, 2005, p. 8). In Bhutan and Myanmar, international tourist arrivals grew dramatically (from a very low base) since the early 1990s. Since the launching of the BIMSTEC in 1997, Myanmar is approaching Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka at the level of 200,000 to 500,000 tourist arrivals per annum, but seems to have slowed down later years at about 1.45 per cent per annum. Still the gap between

them and Thailand, and to a lesser extent, India, is such that growth of tourism in the BIMSTEC as a group depends primarily on these latter two countries (Thein, 2005, p. 8). The increasing well-being of people in many Asian countries led to a rapid growth of intra-regional tourism in Thailand; over 60 per cent of tourists to Thailand are from East Asia including Japan.

If past performances, as shown in Table 1, are any indication of future possibilities, the vision of doubling tourism business in the region by 2010 would seem to be somewhat beyond reach (Thein, 2005, p. 10).

For a long time, the Governments of BIMSTEC countries were never given adequate attention to the development of tourism sector. Since the early 1990s, however, tourism became recognized as an important sector in most of the BIMSTEC countries. In 2004, tourism contributed about 8 per cent of GDP of the Thai economy and to a lesser extent in other countries of the region such as Bangladesh 0.2 per cent, India 0.7 per cent, Nepal 3.3 per cent, and Sri Lanka 4.0 per cent (WTO, 2005). The tourism industry of BIMSTEC countries is contributing to employment generation to a large extent, especially in Nepal, Thailand and India. In Nepal, receipts from tourism constitute over 20 per cent of export earnings. Tourism employment varied between 5 to 11 per cent of total employment in the region. In Thailand, the tourism sector generates almost 1 in every 8.8 jobs in the country, while in Bangladesh, 1 in every 19 jobs are generated by the sector. The ratio for other countries varied between these two figures (Table-4; Wijayasiri, 2002, p. 4).

In India, tourism has been accorded an “Export Industry” status, thereby receiving benefits, which are usually accorded to merchandise exporters (Wijayasiri, 2002, p.7). The Government of Bangladesh first recognized tourism as an important industry with the framing of a National Tourism Policy in 1992. In 1999, tourism was declared as a thrust sector in Bangladesh (Government of Bangladesh, 2005). In Myanmar, tourism has become a growth sector since economic

Table 4: Tourism Sector's Contribution to Export Earnings and Employment in BIMSTEC Countries, 2001

	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Myanmar	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Thailand
Receipts (as % of Exports*)	0.75	6.2		2.4	21.8	10.6	11.1
Receipts (as % of Total Employment)	5.2	na	6.0	8.9	na	7.0	11.3
Direct	2.6	na	2.9	3.4	na	2.9	5.7
Indirect	2.6	na	3.1	5.5	na	4.1	5.6

Notes: *2003; na – Not available.

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council.

liberalization. The Myanmar Tourism Law of 1990 was revised in 1993 to promote systematic development and encourage private sector participation (Thein, 2005, p.10). Likewise, other countries in BIMSTEC have made similar efforts.

In case of tourism market, there seems to be a distinct pattern among the four countries of the South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, and the two eastern members of BIMSTEC, namely, Thailand and Myanmar (Table 5). As for Sri Lanka, its market seems to lie somewhere between these two patterns. Major generating markets for the SASEC countries are UK, Germany and France from Europe, US from the America and intra-regional tourism. The latter among the SASEC countries are so big that as much as 38.8 per cent of outbound travelers from India visited Bangladesh in 2002. That figure does not include many other intra-regional visitors in SASEC countries. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB): “Many intra-regional visitors, particularly, land travels, are not recorded as tourist visitors although they would conform to WTO criteria as such. For example, an estimated 15,000 Indians visit Bhutan annually, but were not counted as tourists. A large number of Indians visit Nepal by land, and vice versa, but only air travels are recorded” (ADB, TA 6131 STU: 24).

For Thailand and Myanmar, the main markets are Japan and from Asia and the Pacific. In fact, over a million Japanese visited Thailand in 2002, although that still ranked second to Malaysia. Although the Japanese market is second in importance in Myanmar, after Taiwan, it has been recognized as the potential market in the future (Thein, 2005).

In the case of Sri Lanka, the major generating markets are UK, Germany and France from Europe, and Japan from Asia. Intra-regional tourism, particularly from India is also quite important. In case of BIMTSTEC as a whole, however, intra-regional tourism is said to be around 7 per cent, which is very low, compared to other intra-regional tourisms in the world, such

Table 5: Major Generating Markets to BIMSTEC Countries, 2002

	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Myanmar	Nepal	Sri Lanka*	Thailand
India	-38.8	US -34.2	Bangladesh -18.3	Taiwan -10.5	India -42.2	UK -18.5	Malaysia -11.7
UK	-13.9	Japan -15.9	UK -16.3	Japan -9.5	Japan -8.4	Germany -17.7	Japan -11.5
US	-6.6	UK -9.3	US -14.6	China -8.2	UK -7.6	India -9.7	China -7.2
China	-3.2	Germany -6.2	Canada -3.9	Thailand -7.8	US -6.4	France -7.9	Taiwan -6.9
Korea	-3.1	Nepal -4.6	France -3.3	US -6.7	Germany -5.7	Netherlands -6.8	Korea -6.5
Netherlands	-2	Australia -3.8	Germany -2.7	France -6.5	France -4.9	Italy -4.5	Singapore -6
Malaysia	-1.8	Netherlands -3.5	Malaysia -2.6	Germany -5.9	Korea -3.2	Japan -3.7	Hong Kong -5.3
Sub-Total	[69.4]	Sub-Total [77.5]	Sub-Total [61.7]	Sub-Total [55.1]	Sub-Total [60.4]	Sub-Total [68.8]	Sub-Total [55.1]

Notes: * 1999.

Source: NTO Statistics.

as 88 per cent for Europe and 22 per cent for South Asia (Wijayasiri, 2002, p.6). On the whole, Europe remains the biggest long-haul tourist market for the BIMSTEC countries. In terms of volume, Japan remains the number one, followed by Malaysia.

4. Expansion of Tourism Market and Potentials for Cooperation in BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC countries can benefit a lot through proper exploration of tourism potentials. Among the BIMSTEC countries, there exists both mutual cooperation and competition. Buddhist Circuit Tourism, comprising four countries of BIMSTEC, namely, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, has been in progress. Several bilateral agreements were also signed on tourism. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have agreed to promote eco-tourism. There have already been some efforts to market the BIMSTEC tourism in the European countries and other regions. Publication of brochures, describing the tourism potentials of the BIMSTEC countries, printing of directory, and web portal have been done.

With a view to promote regional cooperation in tourism, the Second BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Roundtable Meeting was held in Kathmandu in August 2006, which adopted some common agenda and programs to promote in the member countries. The meeting also decided to expand and exchange multi-sectoral cooperation among the member countries, particularly in reaping benefits of rich natural beauty and diverse cultural heritage, which show huge potential. It is to be noted that some member countries of BIMSTEC are also members of SAARC. Both the forums have similar programs to promote regional tourism. The Second SAARC Tourism Ministers' Meeting held in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh in May 2006 adopted a Plan of Action. The salient features of the Plan are as follows: undertaking of familiarization tours, relaxation of visa and frontier formalities, visit SAARC year-2006, printing of common brochure and development website and promotion of public-private partnership in tourism. These programs are to a large extent similar to BIMSTEC Tourism Agenda.

The State Minister of Bangladesh for Civil Aviation and Tourism observed in the Kolkata Ministerial Meeting in February 2005 that there is a tremendous potential of promoting Buddhist Circuit Tourism among the member countries of BIMSTEC. A combined package of Buddhist sites across the region might include sites in Bangkok, Paharpur in Bangladesh, Ananda Temple of Myanmar, Thimpu in Bhutan, Lumbini in Nepal, Kandy in Sri Lanka, along with other Indian Buddhist sites. Adventure tourism packages, including trekking through Bhutan, Darjeeling, Angling in Upper Assam, Shillong in Meghalaya, Sundarbans in Bangladesh, and other places in Myanmar and Thailand, were also mooted.

Current Status of Cooperation in Tourism in BIMSTEC

To strengthen cooperation in the tourism sector among the BIMSTEC countries, an Expert Group on Tourism was set-up and they met as many as seven times since 2004. Based on the decision of the First Summit of BIMSTEC countries held in 2004, the first “Round Table and Workshop of Tourism Ministers and Travel and Tourism Industry Representative of BIMSTEC countries” was held in Kolkata, India in February 2005. The Kolkata Declaration and Action Plan on Tourism included establishment of a BIMSTEC Tourism Information Centre and BIMSTEC Tourism Fund. The Kathmandu Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the second meeting of the Tourism Ministers in August 2006 and also adopted a 14-point Plan of Action to launch joint initiatives to promote tourism. All the seven member countries agreed to contribute US\$ 10,000 each to the BIMSTEC Tourism Fund. Similarly, they agreed to develop tour packages for two or more countries including Buddhist Circuits, eco-tourism, adventure tourism and MICE tourism in cooperation with the private tourism entrepreneurs. The BIMSTEC countries also agreed to ensure parity in entrance fee at archaeological sites, extend accessibility to tourism sites by air, land and water. They have also agreed to organize ‘Familiarization Trips for journalists and tour operators’, introduce ‘Business Travel Cards,’ promote ‘Student Exchanges’ and facilitate more accessibility by air, land and water. The Ministers have also decided to set up a BIMSTEC Tourism Working Group consisting of representatives of National Tourism Organizations and private

stakeholders of tourism from all the member countries. Nepal's Tourism Minister said that all the BIMSTEC members were launching campaigns to double the number of tourists visiting the individual countries within the next three years (source: www.nepalnews.com, dated August 29, 2006).

However, progress towards implementation of the Kolkata Declaration has been very slow, as noted in the second BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Meeting. Except printing and publication of some promotional materials, like brochures, directory, and development of website, no tangible development has taken place as far. However, similar agenda was again reinforced: simplification of travel visa within BIMSTEC member countries, simplification of accessibility within BIMSTEC (by land and air), joint tourism product development, joint packaging and marketing, promotion of eco-tourism and Buddhist circuit tourism, management of BIMSTEC tourism information center, utilization of the BIMSTEC Tourism Fund, encouraging joint venture investment in tourism industry, exchanging information in hotel management institutions and cooperation in human resource development in tourism sector within BIMSTEC member countries, establishment of forums, such as BIMSTEC Tourism Entrepreneurs Private Sector Forum, BIMSTEC Media Forum of Tourism Journalists, explore the possibility of funding from international financial institutions for development of tourism related infrastructure, human resources development for tourism, poverty alleviation programs, to mention a few.

Constraints

Despite occasional meetings and adoption of plans of action, not much real progress is noticed yet in promoting tourism in the BIMSTEC. The following reasons could be considered as impediments to development of tourism in the BIMSTEC region:

- Lack of transport links (air, rail, road and sea transport connecting major tourist destinations).
- Lack of sincerity and political will to promote BIMSTEC as a common tourism destination: This emanates due to competition between the countries for tourists, given that all of the countries

offer somewhat similar tourist products and compete in the same markets.

- There has been a lack of funds and technical expertise. The little seed money that the BIMSTEC Tourism Fund has been established with can pump prime the initial take-off, with publication of promotional materials and familiarization tours.
- Absence of BIMSETC Secretariat: This stands in the way of effective coordination among the relevant departments, agencies and ministries within the BIMSTEC member countries. This need for a permanent institutional framework for the grouping was recognized at the fourth Ministerial in 2001 (Wijayasiri, 2002, p.14). The offer of the Thai Government to manage the BIMSTEC affairs within their Trade Ministry is a stop-gap measure.
- Complicated visa and border formalities are the most crucial factor that stands in the way particularly of intra-regional tourism. Though discussions have taken place, not much easing out in this area is yet in place.
- Government tax on hotel accommodation and food in some BIMSTEC countries is quite high, particularly in Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. An ADB report points out the case of Bangladesh that “Hotel rates in Dhaka are high compared to neighboring countries, reflecting the high taxation imposed on hotels in Bangladesh.” (ADB, 2004).

5. ASEAN, SAARC and SASEC in Promoting Tourism

ASEAN

Cooperation in tourism is one of the main areas of ASEAN activities. At the 8th ASEAN Summit held in Cambodia in 2002, the Heads of States signed a Tourism Cooperation and Promotion Agreement (Thein, 2005, p.17). The ASEAN framework agreement on services includes tourism as a priority area. As a follow-up, projects were initiated for promoting the ASEAN as a single destination, preserving the ASEAN cultural and environmental heritage, promoting intra-ASEAN travel and human resource development in the tourist sector. The ASEAN Tourism Association has initiated the annual ASEAN Tourism Forum, an ASEAN Airline Pass and an ASEAN Hotel Pass. In a span of

slightly over a decade, tourism arrivals in ASEAN countries have grown by an average of 8 per cent per year, moving the region from 12th to 5th rank among the world's top 15 tourist destination. In 1995, ASEAN attracted over 30 million, and in 2005 nearly 50 million tourists.

SAARC

The promotion of tourism and transport cooperation was prominent on the list of 11 SAARC activities under the Integrated Programme of Action. A Tourism Committee was set up in 1991. At its first meeting in October 1991 in Colombo, it agreed on an action plan to cooperate on training programs, information exchange, marketing, investment, intra-regional tourism, among others. There was discussion for producing joint brochures, videos and travel guides, etc. Some of this has been done, but has little impact, due to problems beyond the control of the tourism industry (Wijayasiri, 2002, p.15). Still most SAARC countries require visas to visit each other's countries. The main SAARC tourism agenda includes simplification of visas and direct air links between the capitals of SAARC countries.

The 13th SAARC Summit meeting held in Dhaka during 12-13 November 2005 decided to launch 2006 as the "South Asia Tourism Year." Accordingly, the second meeting of the SAARC Tourism Ministers was held at Cox's Bazar in southeast Bangladesh on 21 May 2006 and the Cox's Bazar SAARC Action Plan on Tourism-2006 was adopted. The Action Plan includes measures in the following areas:

- Promotion of SAARC as a common tourist destination
- Promotion of the role of private sector
- Promotion of human resource development
- Promotion of South Asian Identity through tourism
- Cultural and eco-tourism development, and
- Implementation of the Action Plan

SASEC

In contrast, South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), comprising of Bangladesh, Bhutan, several states of India and Nepal (a sub-region of SAARC as well as that of BIMSTEC)

appears to be moving ahead with considerable success in the tourism sector. It has enlisted the support of ADB in providing technical assistance to formulate a Tourism Development Plan (TDP) for the sub-region (ADB TA 3700). The basic strategic objectives for the SASEC TDP included: i) to develop a cooperative spirit among the tourism industries of the sub-region, ii) to contribute to sustainable economic growth, iii) to use eco-tourism as a tool to reduce poverty, iv) to generate employment opportunities, and v) to facilitate private sector investment in tourism. The TDP worked out seven programs, which began with long-term generic issues of concern to all countries: coordinated marketing, enhancing product quality, facilitating travel and developing human resources. Two programs based on product themes were: developing eco-tourism based on nature and culture, and developing Buddhist Circuit tourism. The seventh program is related to activities enabling the private sector.

It may be emphasized that the SASEC region with its rich nature and its diversity is ideal for developing eco-tourism, otherwise called ‘nature tourism,’ or ‘adventure tourism.’ However, there are debates whether eco-tourism promotes conservation or destruction of nature and local culture. This all depends on where and what kind of infrastructures are built for the purpose, how the tourists and local communities interact with each other. For example, the Ecotourism Society (1991) defines the term as “responsible travel that *conserves* natural environments and *sustains* the well-being of local people” (Ecotourism Society, 1991).

6. Tourism Sector in Bangladesh

National Tourism Policy

Promotion of tourism in Bangladesh under the aegis of the government started in 1972, following independence of the country. The main attractions of the tourism industry of Bangladesh are varied cultural heritages, ancient archaeological sites, Buddhist heritages and many eco-tourism sites, world’s longest natural sea beach, etc. Recognizing the contribution of tourism to the socio-economic development of the country, the government framed the National Tourism Policy in 1992.

In the Tourism Policy, status of tourism industry in Bangladesh was described, aims and objectives were defined and implementation strategies were suggested. The policy identified tourism as a multi-dimensional industry and spelt out the necessity to have an effective coordination among various government ministries, departments, agencies and civil society bodies.

As per the recommendation of the National Tourism Policy, a 'National Tourism Council' headed by the Prime Minister and an 'Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee' headed by the Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism were formed. Unfortunately, both the committees virtually remained dysfunctional. Until now, only two meetings of the National Tourism Council were held. The National Tourism Policy undertook some initiatives for a vigorous promotion of tourism within and outside the country. However, most of those remained unimplemented. Against this backdrop and emergence of private sector tourism industry, it is urgently felt that the 1992 policy needs updating.

National Industrial Policy, 2005

The National Industrial Policy 2005 has recognized tourism as an industry and declared it as a "thrust sector". As per the Industrial Policy, foreign investors have been offered various incentives to invest in tourism industry, which include: (a) Tax exemption on royalties; (b) Tax exemption on the interest of foreign loans; (c) Tax exemption on capital gains from the transfer of shares; (d) Avoidance of double taxation in case of foreign investors on the basis of bilateral agreements; (e) Exemption of income tax on salaries up to three years for the foreign technicians employed in the approved industries; (f) Remittance up to 50% of the salary of the foreigners employed in Bangladesh and the facilities for repatriation of their savings and retirement benefits and personal assets at the time of their return; (g) Facilities for repatriation of invested capital, profits and dividends; (h) Guarantee against expropriation and nationalization of foreign private investment (as per Foreign Private Investment Promotion & Protection Act 1980); (i) Provision for transfer of shares held by foreigners to local partners with the permission from the Board of Investment and the Foreign

Exchange Control Department of Bangladesh Bank; and (j) Reinvestment of repatriable dividend is treated as new foreign investment.

Promotion of tourism industry through public-private partnership has been indicated in both the National Tourism and National Industrial Policies of Bangladesh. For development of human resource in this sector, directives have been given to activate the tourism training institutes. Also in the Industrial Policy, the inclusion of Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT) was proposed in the National Committee for SME Development. Inclusion of the MoCAT would play a positive impact on growing up small and medium size enterprises in tourism sector of Bangladesh.

The Tourism Master Plan

The Tourism Master Plan of Bangladesh prepared in 1988 with the assistance of UNDP/ILO has identified a number of hindrances of the tourism industry and suggested various ways and means for the growth of tourism in Bangladesh. The Master Plan has envisaged a short-term, medium-term and long-term planning strategy for the promotion of tourism in Bangladesh. The short and medium-term strategies are intended to be completed within a 10-year period, the short-term referred broadly to the third and fourth national development plans, and the medium-term extending into the following five year period. Because of the constraints on public sector resources and possible caution on the part of the private sector to commit investment finance on tourism projects, the development programme follows the same broad approach in allocating projects to short and medium-term programmes. Although, in short term, some increase in tourism activity in Bangladesh can be achieved through small-scale product improvements, in the medium and longer term, major product initiatives will be required to achieve the growth targets. The major product development strategies may be 'River Tourism Product', 'Village Tourism Development', 'Cultural Heritage (archeological sites, historic buildings and monuments, museums, fine arts and performing arts etc.)', 'Forest and Wildlife' and other products innovation.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

In the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), there is no specific description about tourism's contribution and its development. In a study report on PRSP (Thematic Group-3 which included tourism), the following strategies and policies for achieving the objectives of accelerated growth, poverty reduction and social development have been recommended: (i) Attractive natural beauty of Bangladesh essentially needs to be popularized through tourism development; (ii) Tourism development will increase the employment and income of the poor and women; (iii) Artistic handicrafts can easily be popularized through tourism; and (iv) Bangladesh's rich culture and religious tolerance can be spread overseas through tourism.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation as National Tourist Organization (NTO)

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) was established in 1972 through a Presidential Order no 143, and placed it under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. It has been entrusted with dual responsibility - promotion of tourism in the country as well as creation of facilities on commercial basis. Since its inception, BPC has been developing and creating various tourist facilities across the country. Till to date, it has created 42 tourism units (hotels, motels, restaurants, tourism centre, picnic spots, duty free shops, drinks corner, etc.) at different places of tourist attractions of the country in order to offer facilities to the tourists. It also runs a National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute (NHTTI), which to date, produced more than 24,000 trained manpower. As per the privatization policy of Bangladesh government, BPC has leased out as many as 11 commercial units to private sector on commercial basis.

Infrastructure

Though communication and transport system in Bangladesh is quite well established, the infrastructure in the tourist places is yet to be fully developed. Tourism and amusement facilities in some areas - like Cox's Bazar, Kuakata, Paharpur, Sundarbans, Teknaf and St. Martin are not sufficient. Presently, there are some tourism infrastructure in and around of Dhaka, the capital city through private

sector initiatives. Owing to lack of funds, construction of tourism infrastructure cannot be undertaken.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- People of Bangladesh are generally very hospitable and tourist-friendly.
- Security is not that bad as often projected by electronic and print media.
- Domestic tourism is increasing steadily. Due to two-day holiday in the week, the trend of moving out for recreation has increased mainly among the middle class people of the society.
- Awareness about tourist attractions among the local community is increasing.
- Communication and transport system has been developed from north to south, east to west.
- The country possesses some unique archaeological sites, cultural heritage and eco-tourism products like the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, the world's longest unbroken sea beach in Cox's Bazar (120 km), the oldest archaeological site in the Southern Himalayas-Paharpur and world's largest terracotta temple - Kantaji Temple in Dinajpur, and spectacular monuments and mausoleums of language movement and liberation war of the country.

Weaknesses

- On the role of BPC, there is debate whether the Corporation should play the role of a mere NTO or a commercial organization or both.
- Frequent changes of officials in the BPC's management and its line ministry.
- Absence of representation of civil society in the BPC's Board of Directors.
- No revenue budget for the promotion of tourism development in the country.
- Absence of a regular policy direction. Due to absence of proper

policy direction, BPC or the private sector can not receive any fund or loan from any quarter.

- There are some flaws in the law of categorizing the country's hotels and restaurants. Categorizing of the hotels and restaurants as Star or non-Star is not under the jurisdiction of the BPC. Non-technical hands or institutions are involved in this process.
- Due to absence of a tourism law, the tour operators or tourism service providers can not be punished for any mishandling of tourists. Also owing to absence of law, tourism products can not be protected or conserved, which is there in many countries of the world.
- The country often suffers from image crisis. The country continues to remain as an unknown destination to the tourist generating countries.

Opportunities

- It is easy to implement eco-tourism, riverine tourism, and spiritual tourism, as the country possesses enough opportunity to develop these types of tourism.
- Government has formulated favourable foreign investment policy to attract overseas investors in readymade garments, leather goods, natural gas and petroleum sector and liberal policy for joint venture investment in tourism sector.
- As there are hundreds of rivers crisscrossing Bangladesh, immense potentiality exists for development of riverine tourism in Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh is located strategically in South Asia.

Threats/Constraints

- Unstable political situation created a bad image abroad, which should be taken as the biggest threat for development of tourism industry overseas.
- Continuous campaign against Bangladesh by certain quarters as a fundamentalist country is another obstacle.
- Unholy alliance between the trade union and political leaders, which disrupts labor discipline.

- Politicization of administration
- Trade Union Menace in the organization
- Rapid growth of population is another big problem. Bangladesh is the most over-populated country of the world, except the city-state of Singapore.

7. Environmental Conditions in the BIMSTEC Countries

Post-Summit New Area of Cooperation in Environmental Management

The leaders of the BIMSTEC countries in their first Summit agreed

“to promote sustainable and optimal energy utilization through development of new hydrocarbon and hydropower projects, interconnection of electricity and natural gas grids, energy conservation and renewable energy technologies,” and

“to explore expansion of BIMSTEC cooperation into new areas of culture, education, public health, protection of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, rural community development, small and medium sized enterprises, construction, environment, information and communication technology, biotechnology, weather and climate research, natural disaster mitigation and management.”

As is evident, the list is quite extensive and together with the original six areas of cooperation, the agenda now includes virtually all aspects of socio-economic and environmental activities. As a matter of fact, environment is crosscutting and it would be a welcome approach if BIMSTEC factors environmental considerations into their decision-making process over all the areas of cooperation. India offered to be the lead country in the areas of environment and disaster management. A decision was taken to establish the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate and various training programs and workshops in the area of remote sensing for environment and disaster management applications.

The Centre would work on improving weather observation and prediction techniques, with the intent of reducing the loss of lives and property, caused by weather and climate-related natural disasters in the BIMSTEC region. The Ninth Ministerial held in New Delhi on 9 August 2006 also agreed to strengthen the member countries' emergency preparedness for natural disasters, especially through early warning systems and networking between the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate and other existing regional institutions, such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre and the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre.

Status of Environment in BIMSTEC Countries: Basic Parameters

In general, the state of Asia's environment is depressing. The litany of environmental ills includes air and water pollution, deforestation, waste disposal, illegal wildlife trade, etc. But the countries face a dilemma: economic growth means more production, more jobs and poverty reduction, but it also means resource depletion and more pollution in many different forms. Further, there is the regional-scale problem of trans-boundary atmospheric and marine pollution. A 2005 UN Report warned that although one-fifth of Asians still exist on less than US \$1 a day, "the region is already living beyond its environmental carrying capacity" (cited in Time, Visions of Green, 02 October 2006). Experiences in OECD countries show that economic growth may also create a solution by turning environmentalism into a valued consumer good. Economists call this cycle 'Environmental Kuznets Curve,' which hypothesizes that once per-capita income reaches a middle range, pollution level begins to plunge.

But, can the BIMSTEC countries wait for "the invisible hand to grow a green thumb?" Therefore, the challenge is a quest for a sustainable 'green growth,' which protects the environment without hindering economic development, so vital for poverty reduction in the region. The good news is that contemporary anti-pollution and energy-efficiency technology is far superior to that used in the West's or Japan's first cleanup.

Environmental Cooperation among ASEAN: Lessons for BIMSTEC

ASEAN has a strong political, institutional and policy framework for environmental cooperation in the sub-region. The overall framework is set out in ASEAN Vision 2020, which, among others, envisions “a clean and green ASEAN with fully established mechanisms for sustainable Environmental development to ensure the protection of the subregion’s environment, the sustainability of its natural resources and high quality of life of its people.” This vision is translated into operational activities as detailed out in the Strategic Plan of Action on the Environment. In addition, the environment ministers at their formal meetings issue Ministerial Declarations that highlight priority issues and actions needed on current developments in the field of environment.

ASEAN has a strong institutional framework, where environmental issues are implemented, monitored and reviewed periodically right up to the levels of the heads of state/government. In addition, close collaboration with other relevant sectors both at national and sub-regional level ensures that environmental issues are well integrated with the social and economic sectors. The institutional framework includes periodic meetings within the framework of ASEAN plus Three Cooperation (China, Japan and South Korea).

ASEAN has attempted to leverage its national resources with those of other relevant regional and international organizations, such as the UNEP and the ADB to implement sub-regional programs. So far, ASEAN has made notable achievements in the following areas:

- **Transboundary Haze:** An ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution is being implemented.
- **Nature Conservation and Biodiversity:** ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation is fully operational with the support of the EU.
- **Coastal and Marine Environment:** Integrated implementation of the initiatives of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and Partnerships for Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA).

- Global Environmental Issues: ASEAN promotes common understanding to articulate regional concerns at international fora. ASEAN also fosters implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) by sharing experiences and expertise among the member countries.
- Other activities included the implementation of the ASEAN Environmental Education Plan 2000-2005, harmonization of environmental indicators and publication of the periodical ASEAN State of the Environment Report.

Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI) of Japan and BIMSTEC Countries

The ESI jointly developed, by the Yale University Center for Environmental Law and Columbia University Center for Earth Sciences, is a composite index tracking 21 indicators, including natural resources, pollution levels, environmental health and environmental management efforts, that characterize and influence environmental sustainability on a national scale. The 2005 ESI covered 146 countries. Finland, with a score of 75.1 out of 100 stands first. Table-6 shows the ranking and score of Japan and BIMSTEC countries.

Table 6: ESI Score and Ranking of Japan and BIMSTEC Countries

Country	ESI Score	Ranking
Japan	57.3	30
Bhutan	53.5	43
Myanmar	52.8	46
Thailand	49.8	73
Sri Lanka	48.5	79
Nepal	47.7	85
India	45.2	101
Bangladesh	44.1	114

The 2005 ESI shows that Japan stands first among the Asian countries, with a ranking of 30 among the 146 countries. It is followed by Bhutan (43) and Myanmar (46). Thailand stands as kind of the

median. It is, therefore, clear that environmental sustainability in most of the BIMSTEC countries is at great risk. In this context, Bangladesh can be said to be as a test case of sustainable development. Extreme pressure of a huge population of over 140 million on the limited resource base has, perhaps, surpassed the country's carrying capacity – in terms of both the source and sink functions of the environment. Deforestation rate in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world. Dhaka's air is one of the most polluted. Table 6 shows that Bangladesh stands lowest among the BIMSTEC countries, with a ranking of 114 out of 146 countries. In such a predicament, the importance of sound environmental policy-making and management for a country like Bangladesh cannot be overemphasized.

Environmental Management in Japan

In this context, Japan's environmental management is an area worth learning about. As a country relatively small and resource poor, but with the second largest economy on earth, Japan has achieved remarkable success in many areas of environmental management. The effluents of affluence appear to be somewhat under control. A survey of environmental management practices reveals some distinctive features of Japan's environmental policy and management (Kawashima, 1995; Center for Global Change, UMCP, 1994):

- The initial focus of environmental management was on pollution control and energy efficiency. Japan has achieved commendable success in these two areas, compared to other industrial nations, including the US. Japan is, in fact, the *Avant Garde* in de-coupling economic growth from pollution and energy intensity. Now the focus has shifted to waste management and resource recovery/recycling, along the model of a 'take back' and 'closed loop society.'
- The dependence on regulatory, command and control measures is giving way to increasing use of economic and social instruments, such as reforms in economic and social systems, aimed at changing the behavior of citizens and corporate bodies.
- The reliance on and application of cooperative models of management, as against the adversarial model in the US, is evident from the following aspects:

- a) The process of joint implementation of pollution abatement measures by major industrial firms, and the provision of technical assistance by industry associations.
 - b) The establishment of partnerships between the public and private sectors. Based on the Administrative Process Act of 1993, with application of the technique of administrative guidance of business and industry, the local governments of Japan have greatly improved the performance of factories by informal negotiations, discussions and consultations, without employing direct and statutory coercive measures.
 - c) The private sector has been encouraged in taking the lead through 'voluntary measures.' For example, the documents of Keidanren and MITI, such as "Global Environmental Charter" and "Corporate Voluntary Plan" are examples of their commitment. Even the US, which had historically followed an adversarial model (a model of competition and litigation), has begun to emulate this cooperative, partnership model.
 - d) With a forest cover over two-third area of Japan, mostly a hilly, mountainous territory, it's a miracle that Japan has one of the highest per capita forests in the world. This is against the fact that Japan is the third most densely populated and the number one industrially dense country in the world. This had been possible through the application of several models of participatory, cooperative management of forests. The most interesting aspect is the massive afforestation under the Forest Cooperatives in the hills of Japan, where most of the forest landholdings are small/marginal and where individual management cannot be an economically viable, self-sustaining unit of forest management.
- Japanese businesses are on an investment drive under the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol for greenhouse gas reduction projects abroad, especially in Asia. Thailand and India already have some CDM projects under Japanese investment. This drive is likely to be intensified in future.
 - Finally, the leadership of Japan in global environmental diplomacy is reflected in the basic premises of the Fundamental Act for Environment of 1993, i.e., promotion of international

environmental cooperation. This commitment is well manifest in Japan's budget of additional funds allocated for global environmental protection. The establishment of environmental research centers in some Asian countries including in Thailand with assistance from Japan is indicative of her commitment to capacity building in this new and vital area in the developing world.

Thus, it is evident that Japan can be taken as a strong case of sustainable environmental management, which offers many lessons to BIMSTEC countries.

8. Japan's Role in Development of BIMSTEC Tourism and Environment Sector

BIMSTEC-Japan economic relations reflect the existing pattern of tourist inflow from Japan to a large extent. Tourism inflow from Japan into BIMSTEC countries can be said to be a function of the level of Japan's economic engagement in the region. Japan's economic relations with all the BIMSTEC countries except Thailand are still weak. Japan's imports from BIMSTEC countries registered 3.8 per cent of Japan's total imports in 2004. However, the share becomes only 0.7 per cent of Japanese total imports if Thailand is excluded. The share of Japan's exports to BIMSTEC countries is also marginal, only 0.7 per cent. Japan's accumulated direct investment to BIMSTEC countries is also minimal, only 2.1 per cent, if Thailand is excluded (Ebashi, 2005, p.2). Strong economic relations of Japan with Thailand are reflected in the tourist inflow - more than 10 per cent of tourists to Thailand come from Japan. Lack of infrastructure, extensive government restrictions and labor problems are regarded as barriers to higher investments from Japan in other BIMSTEC countries.

Japan's share was only 1.6 per cent of Bangladesh's total exports (10th position) and imports from Japan constituted 5.1 per cent of total Bangladesh imports (4th position) in 2003. Japan's major imports from Bangladesh are footwear, fish and seafood, woven apparel and hides and skin. Japan's major exports to Bangladesh are iron and steel, vehicles, equipments under development projects and electric and

textile machinery. However, Bangladesh is one of the largest recipients of Japan's overseas development aid.

As Japan's primary area of politico-strategic and socio-economic engagement is with the Asia-Pacific region, the newly-formed grouping of BIMSTEC as a bridge between the ASEAN and SAARC presents an opportunity for Japan to deepen its relationship. As tourism is a growing economic sector worldwide including in the BIMSTEC region, Japan's engagement in this field with its financial and technical assistance will accelerate the growth process and this in turn can be expected to reduce poverty and enhance the purchasing power of over one-fifth of the global population. In like manner, environmental sustainability in the BIMSTEC countries is of great importance to Japan, as it imports many raw materials based on natural resources from these countries. Japan can contribute to this field in the BIMSTEC countries through transfer of knowledge and technology. This would be a win-win situation for both parties.

Japan is actively involved in the development of tourism sector in Bangladesh. Some of the projects are as follows.

- The Japan Special Fund, helped to create a pool of human resource in tourism sector of the SASEC member countries.
- Bangladesh is currently receiving some voluntary supports for creation of skilled manpower for Japanese market.
- Arrival of Japanese tourists to Bangladesh is increasing every year.
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) showed interest to up-grade the existing Tourism Master Plan of Bangladesh.

9. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

It is evident from the above discussion that tourism worldwide including in the BIMSTEC region is an expanding sector. It is already a significant source of foreign exchange earning and employment generation in some BIMSTEC countries. BIMSTEC countries have potentials to harness, individually and collectively, for development of tourism sector. However, the progress in cooperation in this area in the BIMSTEC region is quite slow, with no substantive achievement even in any particular area. Low levels of intra-regional tourism within

the BIMSTEC countries need to be addressed. It is expected that the governments of the BIMSTEC countries, with lessons learned from other groupings like ASEAN, will take vigorous steps to remove the barriers standing in the way. In this context, Japan with its growing involvement in the BIMSTEC economies can facilitate the process with financial and technical assistance.

In the area of environmental management, BIMSTEC countries have many lessons to learn from Japan.

Policy Recommendations

- Budget tourism aimed at all age groups, particularly the young generation of backpackers needs to be developed, with economy travel, easing of visa formalities, dissemination of information and low-cost but comfortable accommodations, etc.
- For learning lessons from other more successful groupings, visits of groups comprising of tourist officials, private sector entrepreneurs and journalists should be arranged.
- Investment opportunities with liberal incentives need to be communicated to both national and international investors.
- Eco-tourism and Buddhist Circuit tourisms should be grounded on the premise of poverty reduction of local communities. Tourist facilities and products need to be developed with minimum ecological impact. Also, opportunities for employment generation and income earning for the local communities are to be created. There is a project on Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP), run by Nepal. Experience and lessons can be learned from this project.
- Human resource development for tourism through formal and informal education, training and exchange visits is of utmost importance for most of the BIMSTEC countries.
- The ministries of Tourism and National Tourism Organizations of the BIMSTEC countries need to be strengthened.
- As ASEAN and SASEC countries have already some concrete programs in the tourism sector, BIMSTEC can learn from these two groupings. Also the SAARC and BIMSTEC tourism

development programs can be integrated way, so that one reinforces the other.

- A drive for resource mobilization from external sources and development partners like ADB, ESCAP and other donors including Japan is to be initiated. The BIMSTEC Tourism Action Plan recognizes that international and regional organizations involved in tourism could play a significant role in the BIMSTEC initiatives for promoting tourism within and beyond. The ADB expressed interest in drawing up the detailed plan of action on development of tourism-related infrastructure, HRD for tourism, poverty alleviation programs and marketing of tourism products in member countries.
- Quality of service needs to be improved. For the purpose, training at different levels – from top management down to door boys – should be initiated at national and regional levels. In this context, Thailand, the most successful country in tourism within BIMSTEC, can take the lead.
- Strengthening by BIMSTEC of economic cooperation with Japan and other OECD countries will result in more business travel and tourism from these markets into the region. About 50 per cent of the Japanese tourists visit the Asia-Pacific countries. For this market segment, BIMSTEC countries can develop special tourism packages including the Buddhist Circuits.
- In the area of environmental management, an integrated approach needs to be taken for ensuring sustainability. The good practices within the BIMSTEC countries in different areas, such as community-based resource management, energy efficiency and conservation, pollution management, disaster mitigation, etc. need to be disseminated to all the BIMSTEC countries. In this area, Japan, with its successes can be of great assistance. With financial assistance and clean technology transfer, Japan can greatly help the BIMSTEC countries. The model of voluntary partnership between the public and private sector of Japan should be a great learning for the BIMSTEC countries. Also, there are cooperation areas, such as coastal and marine protection and conservation of biodiversity that BIMSTEC countries can learn from the ASEAN group.

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