

The Revolution in the Tourism Landscape in Sylhet, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This research delves into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourist geographies of the Sylhet region in Bangladesh, a pivotal area for the country's economic growth and development. Through qualitative analysis, including interviews and secondary data, the study reveals the severe consequences of the pandemic on various aspects of the tourism industry, such as job losses, economic downturns, and disruptions to businesses. The findings underscore the significant challenges faced by both formal and informal stakeholders in Sylhet's tourism sector, highlighting the need for comprehensive policies and strategies to mitigate the pandemic's effects and foster sustainable tourism recovery. Despite the setbacks, the study identifies opportunities for revitalizing Sylhet's tourism landscapes through concerted efforts in infrastructure development, service enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration, ultimately advocating for a resilient approach to navigating the complexities of the post-pandemic tourism landscape.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Tourist geographies, Sylhet region, Tourism industry, Sustainable recovery

Introduction and background

When it comes to improving development efforts, economic growth, and a nation's global image in today's age of globalization, tourist geography is king. This growing region also serves as a link in the chain that spans national boundaries by bringing together diverse geo-cultures, geographical histories, and cultural ties. According to Winter & Kim (2021), tourism geography is now seen as a crucial tool for several social and economic goals, including job creation, poverty reduction, and the preservation and enhancement of cultural and environmental heritage. Furthermore, it produces 6.8% of the world's exports, 10% of the world's jobs, and 10.4% of GDP (McAler, et al., 2010).

Natural resources are the building blocks of tourist goods; the environment, both natural and man-made, is a key component of tourism geography. Natural disasters, epidemics, conflict, socio-ethnic conflicts, economic disasters, terrorist acts, and other environmental and ecocritical issues can have a profound impact on tourist geography. Therefore, events of this nature significantly affect the tourist industry's long-term prospects by shaping both the geography of tourism and the habits of individual tourists. Nevertheless, the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a threat to the ever-expanding tourist destinations, taking a toll on the industry's supply and demand sides (Ottmann & Noble, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic was responsible for the loss of employment for over 75 million people. According to studies, there could be a significant drop of 60-80% in the number of international tourists

in 2020, leading to a loss of up to US\$ 2.1 trillion in GDP from the travel and tourism industry. The travel and tourism industry stands to lose an astonishing one million jobs every day as a result of the extensive effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly 47.7 million people's formal and informal employment in the travel and tourism industry have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a devastating effect on the culturally diverse, historically significant, and historically rich tourist geographies of South Asia. The World Bank Group predicts that the region's tourist industry will experience a loss of more than US\$50 billion in GDP as a result of this pandemic (Statista, 2020). This pandemic has had a negative impact on both official and unofficial actors and stakeholders in this developing tourist area, including Bangladesh, but it has also had varying effects on the tourist geographies of Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Maldives.

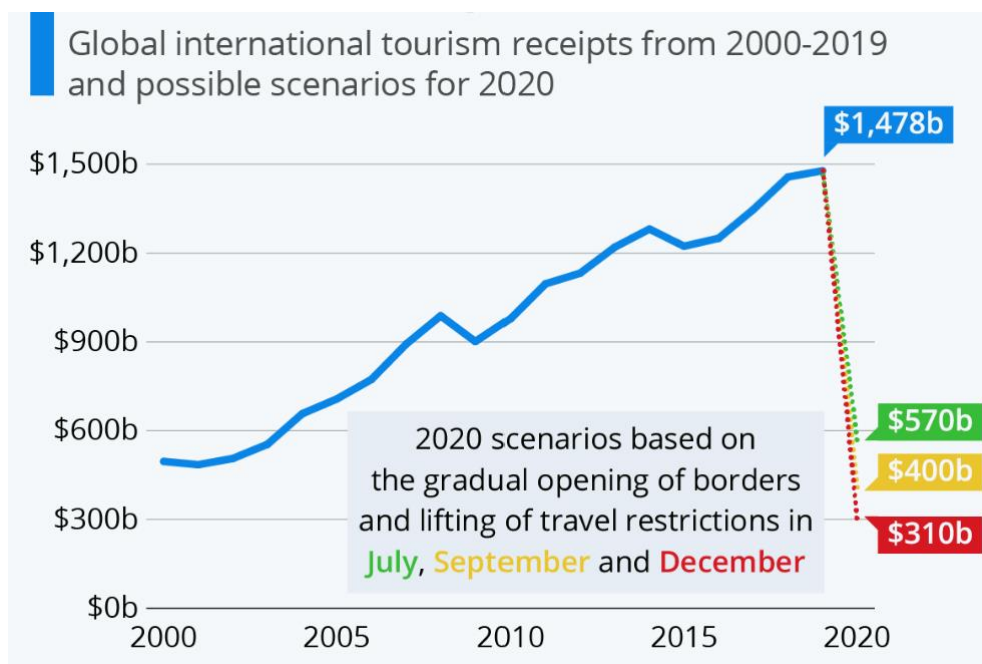


Fig. 1: Pandemic Could Set Tourism Sector Back by \$1 Trillion. (Source: Statista, 2020).

A new report was released by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that uses data from the UNWTO to measure the significant effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism around the world. Statista estimates that the tourist industry could lose more than \$1 trillion in 2020 due to this crisis, and the report warns that as many as 120 million jobs could be in danger (Statista, 2020).

The importance of the tourist industry in maintaining steady jobs, generating income, and protecting both natural and cultural assets was emphasized by Guterres, who emphasized the critical need to revive the sector immediately. He emphasized that tourism is vital to economies because it helps millions of people all over the world and promotes overall economic growth.

International travel was severely restricted in April and May as a result of the pandemic, leading to a nearly 60% drop in tourist arrivals worldwide compared to the same period last year. The World Tourism Organization predicts that international tourist receipts will plummet, possibly reversing the industry's progress of the last two decades, depending on how long travel restrictions remain in place.

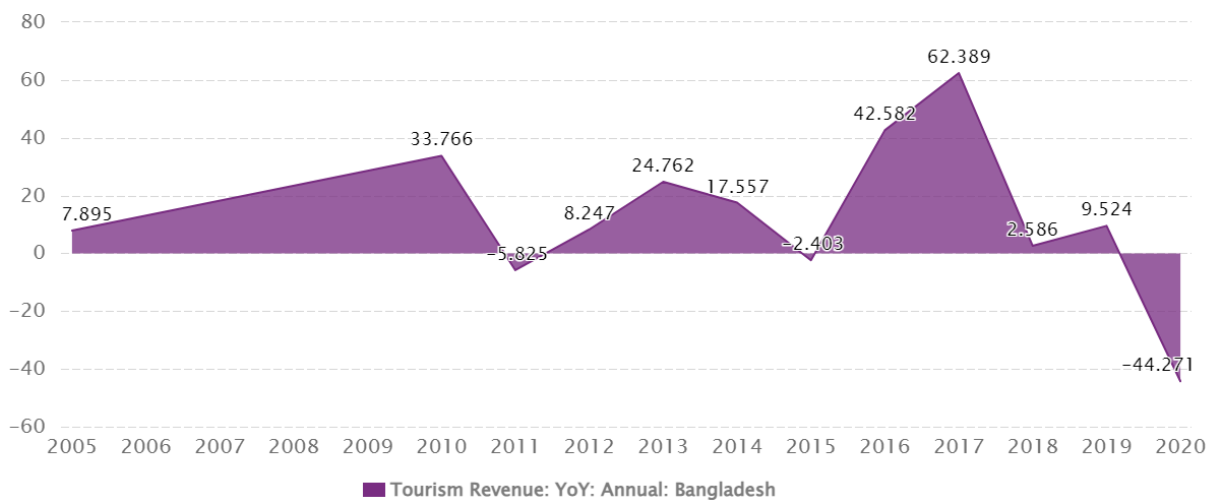


Fig 2: Bangladesh's Tourism Revenue Growth from 2003 to 2020. (Source: CEIC, 2021).

Nevertheless, tourist hotspots have recently been pivotal to Bangladesh's progress and economic growth. Ancient archaeological sites, mediaeval monasteries, religious and cultural sites, the world's largest sea beach in the south-eastern part, the world's largest The mangroves forest—the Sundarbans in the south-western part, and the naturally diverse Sylhet region attract both national and international tourists; these and other unique tourist geographies make Bangladesh a top tourist destination. With a total revenue of \$1,157 billion from 2009 to 2019, the economic size of Bangladesh's tourism geographies amounts to around 500 million BDT. Almost 2.23 million people find work in Bangladesh, in both official and informal sectors, thanks to the average of 550,000 tourists who visit the country every year (Kumar, & Nafi, 2020).

National growth in the economy, regional development, and job markets are all boosted by Bangladesh's tourism industry, particularly in the Sylhet region. Tourists flock to Sylhet, Bangladesh, to experience its beautiful landscapes, which include the Surma and Kushiara Valleys, surrounded by lush tropical forests and picturesque tea gardens. As a result of its diverse tourist spots, straightforward transportation facilities, comfortable hotel and resort adaptations, and standard services for customers provided by both public and private authorities, Sylhet is emerging as a promising tourist geography. It is located between the Khasia and the Jaintia hills on the north and the Tripura hills on the south. The flatness of this land is broken up by a multitude of raised tea gardens, rolling countryside, and exotic flora and fauna (Hafsa, 2020). The four districts that make up the Sylhet region serve as a focal point for ecotourism, leisure tourism, cultural tourism, and religious tourism due to its favorable geographical location. Because of its ecological and historical diversity as well as its relatively easy and practicable road, rail, water, airway, and spot-to-spot communications, Sylhet is a popular tourist destination for both domestic and international visitors (Hafsa, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the tourist regions of Bangladesh, including the Sylhet region, causing widespread economic disruption, a decrease in human mobility, the loss of jobs, and other problems. According to Statista (2020), the ongoing coronavirus pandemic in Bangladesh is threatening 420,000 formal jobs and 50 million jobs in the informal sector, with a GDP loss of approximately US\$2.03 billion. The tourism regions of Bangladesh, including the Sylhet region, will suffer a total estimated loss of 97.5 billion Bangladeshi Taka (BDTT) due to the following factors: a loss of over 6 billion BDT in the aviation industry, 15 billion BDT in hotels and restaurants, and 30 billion

BDT in travel agents (Haque, 2021). Analytical connections between recreational landscape and the COVID-19 pandemic are developed in this study, which nevertheless investigates the micro consequences of the virus on various players in Sylhet's tourist geographies. This paper examines the ways in which the micropolitical lives and economic circumstances of marginalized people, the business and recreation environments, and the local labor market have been affected by the macroeffects of the coronavirus pandemic. It makes its assessment based on in-depth interviews and informal conversation. The study focuses on the tourism geographies of Sylhet division. Furthermore, this research contends that the coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on Sylhet's local companies, marginal professions, industries, and entrepreneurs, as well as the intricate webs of economic activities centered on tourism.

Literature review

Worldwide, tourist hotspots have been profoundly affected by the biopolitical, socioeconomic, and psychological effects of pandemics throughout history. The supply and demand chains for recreational services were both affected by the cholera outbreaks that occurred between 1961 and the present, which had a devastating effect on domestic and international tourist destinations (Butler, 2000). As a result of the rapid spread of the virus to 37 countries through air travel, a brief coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on Chinese tourism. Many people and businesses in the UK's tourism industry lost a lot of money because of the outbreak of foot and mouth (Winter & Kim, 2021). In terms of tourist arrivals in East Asian tourism geographies, McAleer et al. (2010) explained that SARS is more impactful than Avian Flu. The Mexican tourism sector lost \$2.8 billion due to the swine flu or 2009 flu. Nearly \$2.6 billion was lost by Korean tourism regions due to MERS-CoV (2012–present) (Butler, 2000). Malaria, yellow fever, dengue, and Ebola all had a significant impact on tourist destinations around the world, according to studies (Ottmann & Noble, 2024). A 47% drop in tourist arrivals was caused by a country's malaria risk. From 2015 onwards, the ZIKA outbreak has had a devastating impact on Latin American tourism, causing major sporting events to be postponed and resulting in a loss of approximately 3.5 billion dollars (Butler, 2000).

However, no other pandemic or worldwide disaster has had a greater impact on tourist hotspots around the world than the COVID-19 pandemic. By compiling and analyzing worldwide evidence of pandemics, such as the present COVID-19 pandemic, Karabulut et al. (2020) reached the conclusion that pandemics have a negative impact on tourist geographies. According to this research, low-income countries see a decline in tourism and social and economic development whenever a pandemic strikes. According to text mining techniques, countries see a significant drop in tourist income and GDP as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic travel restrictions were multi-layered and had a devastating effect on the supply and demand aspects of tourist destinations. For the developing tourist regions across the globe in the days after COVID, the authors made the assumption of unstable tourism regimes.

By reviewing the scientific literature on past worldwide pandemics and their effects, Butler (2000) put the present coronavirus pandemic into perspective. Based on previous research, this study analyzes how the COVID-19 pandemic affected various sectors, including the travel and tourism industry, the government, consumer habits, and leisure time. Following an analysis of the systemic factors influencing tourism in areas hit by the coronavirus, the report provides recovery paths for dealing with complex pandemic emergencies. There was a dramatic shift in the worldwide hierarchy of leisure activities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a quick evaluation by Uddin (2024). Strict bans on

public gatherings, interpersonal interactions, mobility, and maintaining social distance have the potential to alter the values and norms of tourist destinations globally, leading to a precipitous drop in tourism and economic uncertainty for those involved. As a result of economic revenue, as socio-cultural exchanges, human-nature contacts, and national image, the tourism industry has been greatly impacted by the global COVID-19 outbreak. In light of the current pandemic situation, this study reevaluates the need of effective synthesis strategies, decisions, policies, and partnerships to secure tourist hotspots that can withstand the disease. The global tourism order, according to Harchandani and Shome (2021), would face a "new normal" in the world after the coronavirus pandemic. This would be characterized by a positive transformation of the chains of supply and demand in the tourism sector, brought about by a set of newly established values and standards. To return to the core principles of sustainable tourism, we must work together to lessen the negative effects of COVID-19 in a fair and equitable manner.

South Asian tourist hotspots, such as Bangladesh, have also felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Kumar and Nafi (2020) shows that the coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact on tourist hotspots in Bangladesh. As a result of the nationwide lockdown especially restrictions on human mobility, the stock market mechanisms, corporations, entrepreneurs, and businesses centered around the tourism industry have been significantly impacted. This study proposes likely scientific as well as efficient policies to deal with the negative impact of this pandemic, taking into account the prospects of various tourist geographies of Bangladesh, such as Chattogram and Sylhet, among others, as destinations for both local and foreign tourists. Travel restrictions, flight cancellations, and the closure of hotels, resorts, and restaurants have had a devastating impact on inbound and outbound tourism, as pointed out by Uddin (2024). Most of the people who work in the tourism industry, whether officially or informally, lose their jobs when businesses in the industry suffer huge economic losses. The reopening of Bangladesh's tourist industry could be achieved through a policy nexus between the public and private sectors. From an economic and environmental perspective, Hafsa's (2020) research analyses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected tourist geographies in Bangladesh. This research confirms previous findings that the national GDP as well as contribution from the tourist industry fell precipitously following the COVID-19 pandemic. While the coronavirus pandemic has had a negative impact on tourism jobs, visitor numbers, hotel revenue, and leisure activities, it has had a positive effect on the natural environment in Bangladeshi tourist hotspots. Taking into account the good and bad parts of COVID-19, the study proposes a number of recovery strategies for the sustainable tourism industry. Following the Computable General Equilibrium Model (CGE), Hafsa (2020) recommended government stimulus packages, coping mechanisms, and institutional integrity to lessen the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Bangladesh's tourism industries.

The tourism industry in Bangladesh's Sylhet region has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, which has had a wide range of negative effects, including but not limited to: job losses, regional GDP, company closures (both big and small), and economic losses. As the tourism regions (natural, cultural, religious, recreational, and eco-tourism) of the Sylhet region continue to grow, numerous studies (Uddin, 2024) address the opportunities, threats, policies, strategies, mechanisms, public-private dynamics, and the expectations and satisfactions of tourists. However, there has been no research that specifically addresses how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the tourist hotspots in Sylhet up until this point. This study aims to fill the knowledge gap by establishing logical relationships between the geography of tourism and pandemics, and by identifying the contextual relevance of this topic for the Sylhet region.

Theoretical background

The investigation establishes analytical connections between the geography of tourism and the COVID-19 pandemic, and it explains how the pandemic affected the tourism industry in the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Pandemics occur when a disease or epidemic breaks out on a worldwide scale and spreads geographically as a result of human movement, contact, and other forms of social interaction. It affects a large population over a vast area that goes beyond national borders. Some of the characteristics of a pandemic that have been described by McAleer et al. (2010) include "wide regional extension, infectious movement, freshness, severity, high rate of attack and rapidity, minimal demographic immunity, infectiousness and contagiousness." In addition to health crises, the global geo-economic order, particularly the spatially diversified geography of tourism, is poised to be impacted by pandemics (Butler, 2000).

The field of tourism geography primarily applies human geography to the study of location in the context of leisure and travel (Butler, 2000). According to Williams (2009), tourism geographies are more than just physical places; they are also environments where people form social connections and identities through the experience of a sense of belonging. And because it involves "human-environment interactions as well as landscapes; the preservation and care of places and ecosystems; spatial behavior and movement of people (Harchandani & Shome, 2021)," among other things, tourism is inherently geographical. Tourism geography, which emerged in response to the multiple waves of globalization, is a complex web of interconnected fields that includes leisure, culture, society, education, health, religion, business, and travel. Physical features, such as airports, railways, roads, and waterways, as well as recreational areas, link other human geographies and contribute to a state's economic and social development through tourism. Certain recreational geography has an effect on local and global tourism industries based on favorable perceptions of physical and human geographies, the availability and quality of services, and other factors. The amount of tourism to a certain location is heavily influenced by factors such as the ease of human movement from one location to another, the nature of the relationships between various actors, the level of security in the area, and the availability of services and facilities.

Disasters like pandemics, civil wars, and sociopolitical unrest can have a devastating impact on tourist hotspots. These things have a negative impact on a country's economy, business climate, openness to trade, employment rate, conservation of space, transportation stability, international reputation, and sustainable resource politics. Pandemics pose the greatest danger to tourist destinations across the globe due to their widespread and devastating effects (Mostafanezhad et al., 2020). Research by Zheng, et al. (2020) suggests that travel plays a crucial role in disease surveillance and epidemiology, which can lead to both the fast spread of global epidemics and a decline in tourism.

Travel bans, mobility restrictions, social distancing, crowding curbs, quarantine requirements, and border control are examples of nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPI) that have been implemented in response to the latest SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, which has halted global tourism (Uddin, 2024). The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on areas such as "the demand side" (travel restrictions, border closures, guests' fear of infection) and "the supply side" (the closure of lodging and dining establishments, leisure facilities utilized for tourism). In 2020, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council, worldwide tourism lost nearly \$4.5 trillion, which was a 49.1% drop in GDP from 2019 levels. Global employment in the sector fell to 272 million in 2020 from 334 million in 2019, a decline of 62 million jobs or 18.5%. There was a 45% drop in spending by domestic visitors and a record 69.4% drop

by international visitors. A dynamic stochastic general equilibrium (DSGE) model was recently developed by Yang et al. (2020) to evaluate the effects of pandemics on tourist destinations. The model demonstrates that, because of COVID-19, demand for tourism decreases as health risks increase (Karabulut et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, caused a dramatic decline in tourism to many parts of Bangladesh. Approximately \$470 million will be lost by the tourism industry of Bangladesh due to the coronavirus pandemic. A significant drop in tourism has been observed in the Sylhet region, which was once one of Bangladesh's rising tourist hotspots. As a result of travel restrictions, social isolation, and other measures taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sylhet Chamber of Commerce estimates a \$10 billion hit to the tourism industry in the Sylhet division.

Methodology

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences for many different groups and individuals engaged in the tourist industry in the Sylhet region of Bangladesh, and this investigation is an exploratory one. From an ontological standpoint, this study delves into the research area to find answers to the question of "how the adverse reality is fixing the fact" (Lincoln, et al., 2011). This coronavirus pandemic is being studied in an effort to determine the potential effects on local human resources, the functioning of various sectors, both public and private, and their daily lives and livelihoods. But we used secondary sources to compile our data for this qualitative study.

In order to evaluate how the pandemic has affected the people of Sylhet who are living hand-to-mouth and investigating businesses centered on tourist geographies, this study employs three basic approaches to qualitative interviews, as suggested by Patton (2001): informal conversational discussion, general interview guide, and standardized open-ended interview. The people who rely on tourism in this part of Bangladesh have been the focus of an informal conversational interview to learn about their experiences during the global epidemic and its negative impacts on them. Selected respondents were interviewed using a standardized open-ended questionnaire after a preliminary checklist of questions was developed; this allowed them to share their experiences freely and thoroughly.

Background and factors for Sylhet's tourism growth in Bangladesh

One of South Asia's most rapidly developing tourist destinations is Sylhet. You can't ignore the role that tourism geography plays in this region's growth and development of the economy in Bangladesh. Each of the four districts that make up the administrative division of Sylhet in Bangladesh is home to a multitude of popular tourist attractions. Because it allows visitors to experience the country's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and religious sites all at once, the Sylhet region is unlike any other tourist destination in Bangladesh. The region's picturesque setting amid the Surma and Kushiara valleys, hills, hoars, and forests is drawing an increasing number of tourists from all over the world. Tourism in the Sylhet region attracts 20–25 lakh visitors annually, significantly boosting the region's economy (Kumar & Nafi, 2020).

Sylhet district is a popular tourist destination due to its many attractions, including Ratargul Swamp Forest, Bisnakandi, Jaflong, Lalakhal, Bholaganj, Tamabil, Hakaluki estates, Museum of Rajas, the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA), and many more. There are a plethora of resorts, motels, and hotels that adhere to national and international standards, including three 5-star establishments including Noorjahan Grand, Rose View, and Dusai. However, these housing options are

readily accessible in Sylhet town. Most of Sylhet's tourist spots do not have standard or secure housing options. However, thanks to its well-developed communication facilities, getting from one place to another is not too difficult. From Sylhet city, visitors can reach popular tourist spots by a variety of micro vehicles, including auto-rickshaws, private cars, rickshaws, motorcycles, boats, and more. From Sylhet's central business district, most tourist routes lack direct bus service.

Tourist attractions abound in Moulvibazar district, which is often called the "Land of Tea." These include Madhabpur Lake, Madhabkunda Eco Park, Lawachara National Park, Hakaluki Haor, Madhabkunda Waterfall, the Shah Mustafa shrine, Baikka Beel Wetland Sanctuary, and countless more tourist hotspots. There are several three-star hotels, resorts, and cottages, as well as five-star hotels like Dusai and the Grand Sultan Tea Resort and Golf. Moulvibazar welcomes around 5 lakhs of tourists annually. The district's tourism economic turnover is heavily influenced by the tea tourism of Sreemangal and the Monipuri loom industry of Kamalganj.

Satchari National Park, Sankar Pasha Shahi Mosque, Rema Kalenga Reserved Forest, Bithangal Akhra, Komola Ranir Dighi, and numerous other attractions and accommodations can be found in Habiganj. Habiganj is a popular tourist destination, drawing nearly 2 lakhs of visitors annually. Habiganj is quickly becoming one of the most popular destinations for business travelers in Bangladesh, thanks to its abundance of natural resources, hydrocarbon deposits, the Sylhet region's rapid industrialization, and the tea industry. Habiganj is a popular destination for tourists from all over the world, thanks to its convenient location between Dhaka and Chittagong, its proximity to the Sylhet region, and its connections to various cultural and geographical areas of Bangladesh. You can get to most places in Habiganj by taking a bus or a micro vehicle. There aren't enough places to stay at most tourist attractions. Guests of Habiganj Sadar and the other Sadar in Upazila can find lodging options here. The district branding for Habiganj is 'Hills, hillocks, marshlands and woods are interwoven with the tourism of Habiganj.' This decision was made in light of the growing potential and range of tourist destinations in the area.

Sunamganj is a popular tourist destination due to its numerous attractions, such as Tanguar Haor, Pailgaon Zamindar Bari, Hason Raja Museum, Pagla Masjid, Limestone Lake of Tekergat, House of Baul Musician Shah Abdul Karim, Shimul Garden, Barikka Tila, Niladri Lake, and many more. Sunamganj's tourism engine relies on a complex network of natural resources, cultural tourism, and unique haor tourism to stay afloat. These tourist spots attract approximately 5 lakhs of people annually. Tahirpur Upazila is the most popular destination for tourists. This is the best area to visit because not only are there plenty of attractions, but you can also see the stunning landscapes of the Indian state of Meghalaya from these spots. Many different modes of transportation are utilized for communication, including CNG, motorbikes, speedboats, rickshaws, and easy bikes. Unfortunately, Sunamganj's lodging, and communication options fall short of national and international expectations, which is a major cause for concern. The tourism geographies of Sunamganj are falling behind due to a lack of necessary infrastructure facilities, multifaceted entrepreneurship, security environment, and tourists' satisfaction analysis, despite the fact that numerous governmental and nongovernmental initiatives are working to develop these areas.

There is a complex web of business, investment, communication, entrepreneurship, employment, corporatism, marketing, and research that links these diverse tourist geographies of the Sylhet region. The tourist hotspots in Sylhet offer a wealth of opportunities for the local workforce, investors, entrepreneurs, transportation professionals, and public and corporate authorities on a global scale. The

regional tourism geographies of Sylhet are built upon rapid and available communication facilities, such as roads, rails, air, and waterways. The main challenges to the development of a sustainable tourism and recreation industry in Sylhet include an inadequate marketing strategy, poor branding, outdated ecotourism practices, and infrastructure that is harming the local environment due to development projects (Haque, 2021). A promising sector with ever-emerging economic growth and development, Sylhet's economic geography has been undergoing fast change over the past two decades.

COVID-19 pandemic and Sylhet tourism geography

Due to the national lockdown along with other limitations on human mobility, the tourism landscapes of Bangladesh have seen a significant decline in tourist arrivals. The four districts that make up the Sylhet division have all suffered heavy losses, which has put a damper on economic, social, and political progress. There has been a significant negative impact on the demand and supply sides, on both micro and macro actors, and on the intricate network of recreational geographies in the Sylhet region. Nonetheless, the study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the number of visitors and tourists to Sylhet, which has had an impact on the city's tourism geographies. From March 2020 through July 2020, for example, these tourist spots were off-limits to the public. Following this, the government announced that these tourist spots would be open to the public, but only under the condition that visitors observe certain health and safety measures, such as maintaining a safe distance, wearing masks, and regularly washing and sanitizing their hands. A maximum number of tourists allowed into any given attraction was determined by the local administration. The tourist spots' limited operations only served to keep the industry afloat. No international tourists visited these locations during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to this study. No official effort has been launched by the government to calculate the extent to which the pandemic has impacted the Sylhet region's tourist industry. Business owners and operators of tourist attractions have demanded financial compensation from the government for the harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

More than BDT 10 billion has been lost in tourism geographies in Sylhet as a result of this coronavirus pandemic. Human mobility is considered the lifeblood of tourist geographies in Bangladesh, including the Sylhet region, and the country-wide lockdown made it next to impossible to operate the tourism sector's activities due to this prohibition. This study's results show that over 40 lakhs of locals have access to formal and informal employment opportunities in the four districts of the Sylhet region: Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, and Sunamganj. The majority of workers lost their jobs or had to drastically alter their work schedules as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impact on the economy and society.

There was a significant slowdown in regional GDP and overall economic growth because nearly all tourist attractions were deserted during the pandemic. Due to the nationwide lockdown and shutdown, as well as official limits on human movement and mobility, the role that tourism geographies play in national development has come to a standstill. There was a shortage of funds to pay the daily and annual salaries of the staff at the tourist spots, where formal as well as informal workers earn a living.

Conclusion

From what we can see, the travel as well as mobility restrictions, as well as the formal regulations put in place to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, have had a significant impact on the tourist geographies of the Sylhet region. One of the developing and expanding tourist centers in Bangladesh and South Asia,

the Sylhet region makes a sizable contribution to the country's gross domestic product and economic growth. Those involved, either directly or indirectly, in the administration and operations of Sylhet's tourist geographies are unlucky to be caught up in this coronavirus pandemic. Most businesses, including restaurants, hotels, motels, cottages, and transportation services, see a precipitous drop in revenue and profit. To stay alive during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of them had to quit their regular jobs. Tour guides, cameramen, marketplace sellers, boatmen, hotel as well as restaurant employees, auto-rickshaw passengers, brokers, and others were among the marginal actors whose lives were profoundly affected by transformations and tragedies. To sum up, the tourism landscapes of Sylhet have been hindered in their development and expansion due to this pandemic, which poses a significant threat to their future. In addition, the formal initiatives fall far short of what is required to maintain Sylhet's tourist geographies. Despite this, Sylhet's diverse and multi-faceted tourist attractions could be a boon to Bangladesh if the country can overcome its structural limitations, build a service-based economy around its tourist spots, construct high-quality hotels, motels, and restaurants in the area, and guarantee security. This will all be possible through a national-local nexus, commitment, and a coordinated vision over regional and national development in the face of the complex challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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