

Three island tourism parks are set to enrich tourist attractions of BD

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Artist's impression of Naf Tourism Park, Jaliardwip, Cox's Bazar

Dhaka : Three island tourism parks - now being built - are set to further enrich the tourist attractions of Bangladesh.

For the greater good of the country, plans have been set in motion, to transform the tourism sector of the country in general and Cox's Bazar region in particular.

Bangladesh Economic Zone Authorities (BEZA) has taken up three projects_ (1) Naf Tourism Park, (2) Sabrang Tourism Park and (3) Sonadia Eco Tourism Park_ all located in the district of Cox's Bazar.

BEZA wants to transform tourism industry of the country within the next five years and aims to generate USD 2 billion for the economy and create two hundred thousand new jobs from these parks, which they feel will also encourage development across the country.

BEZA is currently developing three tourism parks in three islands in Cox's Bazar with the hope that it will attract tourists from both home and abroad as well as create scope for additional foreign and local investment. These island-based ecotourism parks have massive potential since people want to enjoy their vacations in a calm and peaceful environment.

Both domestic and foreign tourists are expected to get more facilities, once the projects are implemented and that will help attract more tourists.

BEZA is set to offer 100 per cent tax exemption for the first 10 years, followed by 70 per cent and 30 per cent tax exemptions in the 11th and 12th year, respectively.

Besides, investors would be entitled to receive exemption on stamp duty, park land registration fee and dividend tax and customs duties.

The main objective of the tourism parks is to increase economic growth by creating job opportunities through business diversifications.

Of the three proposed tourism parks, Naf Tourism Park has already attracted foreign investment with recent signing of MoU with a company from Thailand.

Naf Tourism Park

Bangladesh is going to get a new tourist attraction as BEZA has initiated measures to develop modern tourism facilities on 'Jaliardwip' - a 271-acre island on Naf river. The project is titled as 'Naf Tourism Park'.

Jaliardwip, the once neglected island is located in the middle of Naf River and was illegally occupied by a group of locals for over 40 years. BEZA has already been able to get rid of most of these encroachers and now it is set to become the very first river based tourism park.

The first park of its kind will open a new era of tourism in Bangladesh as it will have all world-class facilities found in world-class tourism parks across the globe.

Siam Siam International, a Thai company is reported to have shown interest in investing USD 500 million - equivalent to BDT 4,200 crore - to develop various tourist facilities at Jaliardwip island.

Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Thai company in this regard.

Jaliardwip is an amazing island in the middle of the Naf River and it lies between the river border of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Having hill and river view, it is multifaceted, diverse and admirably beautiful.

The purest air and lofty hill create perfect conditions for the development of all types of tourism and entertainment facilities. The lofty hill and river have created a perfect condition for the island to be a world-class tourist spot.

A 5.2 km long embankment will be build around the park. BEZA has also received clearance from the Ministry of Forest and Environment to operate cable cars.

The Naf Tourism Park extends over a total of 271.93 acre land, which is 456 km from Dhaka and 185km from Chittangong. It is 70km from the Cox's Bazar Airport.

According to BEZA, UNICONSULT, a Germany-based consultancy firm carried out the feasibility study and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) while the Socio-economic Impact Assessment (SIA) has been done by Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, India.

The Department of Environment (DoE) has provided environmental clearance for the development of the tourism park.

The new island has an excellent scope of future tourism expansion as it is a calm and quiet place, and no resettlement is required.

An attractive hanging bridge will be constructed beside the land port for journey to Jaliardwip. Tourists will reach the Jaliardwip to enjoy the beauty of nature. The island would be connected to the main land through a cable car and roller coaster.

It may be recalled that in May 2015 Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the project under which Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA), took steps to develop Jaliardwip, as an international standard tourism park as part of its master plan to develop 100 special economic zones across the country.

The tourism park will have facilities like five-star hotel, hanging bridge, 9.5 kilometre cable car network, floating jetty, children's park, eco-cottage, oceanarium and water-restaurant, hanging resort, convention centre, swimming pool, fun lake, aqua lake, fishing jetty, amusement park, parking area and shopping area for the tourists.

Moreover, the economic zones authorities also plan to set up a theme park where touch pool, night camp, bird watching and watch tower, water sports complex, butterfly park, eco-energy park, game parlour, mini-golf course, MICE club, health club, light and sound show would be available for the tourists.

The park is expected to create direct and indirect jobs for nearly 20,000 people.

It may be noted that the island first surfaced in eighties and the government has taken a development plan of this island, which is surrounded by beautiful mountains and close to green Netang Hills.

Construction of a hanging bridge and land development had made good progress. BEZA is implementing a tree plantation programme in the island. Work on installation of power supply in the island is progressing fast. A design has been finalised to construct a ring embankment to protect the island from cyclone.

It is expected that Jaliardwip is going to open a new chapter for tourism sector in the country. Myanmar and Netang Hill will entertain the visitors and attract the domestic and foreign nature lovers.

Seafront Tourism Park at Sabrang

Encompassing 1027 acres of land, Sabrang Tourism Park is set to be located in Teknaf and will be the first ever seafront tourism park in Bangladesh.

The proposed Park is 5 km away from Teknaf town and the Cox's Bazar-Sabrang Marine Drive is the access road to the proposed park and this connects the National Highway (N1) in a stretch of 5km.

The park is 96 km away from the Cox's Bazar Airport and 9km from the Teknaf Land Port.

Besides, the Sabrang Tourism Park is at the lip of the island Bador Mokam, where one can enjoy both sunrise and sun set staying at sandy beach.

The government is developing the exclusive tourism park with facilities including: hotel complexes, eco-tourism elements, floating jetty, marine aquarium, sea cruise, eco-cottage, oceanarium and floating restaurant.

The tourism park located with exclusive beach front from where a coral island the Saint Martin could be easily reached by half an hour through sea cruise.

BEZA has also plan to build an international standard ocean-park, golf course, duty-free shopping mall, food courts, souvenir shops, hospital, theatres, helipad, business centres and 3D aquarium at the Sabrang Tourism Park.

The Sabrang Park will be developed in a planned way including jetties, observation tower, harbours, hotel, motel, shopping centre and those are scheduled to be completed within 2020.

At the tourism park, the tourists from home and abroad are expected to enjoy all kind of tourism and entertainment facilities in the safest, calm and reserved environment.

New 'tourist city' at Red Crabs island

Sonadia, also known for Red Crabs, is an island located in Maheshkhali and by 2020, will become home to Sonadia Eco Tourism Park.

The government plans to build this park along 37,000 acres of land, comprised of Sonadia and other adjacent islands.

The Ministry of Land has given consent to BEZA to use approximately 12,000 acres of land, as land encroachment remains a major challenge.

Sonadia Eco Tourism Park is expected to be a new tourism city like Cox's Bazar. BEZA has already created a master plan and completed the initial surveys. The only obstacle that remains is the issue of land encroachment, it is learnt.

Since Sonadia Island is 2.7km away from the main land, BEZA has plans to connect the port with bridges that will be completed by 2030 and till then there is plan to use ferries for transportation.

In an effort to protect the eco-system by building observation towers, BEZA also has plan to make 1.25 km area inaccessible to the public.

In order to keep the island eco-friendly, only 25 per cent of the land will be used for the infrastructure without harming the existing stocks of lush green.

Sonadia Eco Tourism Park will have marine parks, museums, marine cruises, water sports and small shopping centres.

Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) has urged the businesspeople to invest in the three eco-tourism parks_ Naf, Sabrang and Sonadia. Tourism business will be flourished in the country if this sector gets tax holiday.

BEZA sources said that private entrepreneurs can invest in these three eco-tourism parks as such investment is needed to attract tourists from home and abroad. These three parks will create economic activities worth USD 2.0 billion annually and generate jobs for 200,000 people.

It is expected that tourists will be encouraged to visit these parks when the area will be connected with train service. These three eco-tourism parks will play a vital role in building a developed Bangladesh, as it will create huge jobs. Such planned tourism destinations will attract huge tourists from home and abroad.

According to a Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism source, tourism sector of the country now earns less than USD 100 million a year. These projects will help earn a lot more than that.