Challenges and Scope of Tourist Policing in Bangladesh: An Analysis

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Abstract

The global economy widely recognizes the tourism industry as a very prosperous and financially rewarding sector. The tourism sector is experiencing sustained growth in emerging and developed nations. Safety and security are crucial for achieving excellence in tourism. The objective of this study is to gain insight into the inherent difficulties associated with tourist policing and to examine the extent of their implementation in Bangladesh. The study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing secondary sources to analyze the study's relative issues through thematic analysis. This study outlines the challenges faced by the tourist police in Bangladesh, including the controversy surrounding tourist destinations, infrastructure issues, manpower shortages, insufficient logistics support, planning and evaluation requirements, short-term posting, the deployment of untrained personnel, inadequate ICT-based tourism orientation, limited social media and online engagements, social and political instability, and conservatism. Tourist police play a crucial role in cultivating a robust brand image for tourist destinations, building tourist trust, promoting responsible tourism and eco-tourism, and contributing to the advancement of the tourism sector and economic growth in Bangladesh. Finally, this study suggests placing significant importance on training and skill development, providing enough logistical support, fostering cooperation among stakeholders, and improving coordination to prioritize providing a sense of security to tourists and ensure timely and effective responses to their needs.
Keywords: Challenge, Policing, Safety, Security, Tourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a dynamic and very profitable sector for the world economy and many developing countries, including Bangladesh. Both developing and developed countries consider the tourism sector as an expanding industry. It substantially enhances Bangladesh's GDP growth rate both directly and indirectly by providing employment opportunities for men and women, alleviating poverty, promoting local community involvement, making foreign currency from international tourists, improving local living standards, and fostering social and economic stability (Hafsa, 2020). The economic growth of the nation is significantly supported by tourism. The total contribution of travel and tourism to Bangladesh's national GDP was BDT 809.6 billion (4.7 percent of the total GDP), with estimating a yearly increase of 6.4% to BDT 1,596.0 billion (5% of the overall GDP) by 2026. (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015). The World tourist Organization (WTO, 2022) indicates that revenue from tourism reached a record high of 391 million USD in December 2019.

Tourism in developing countries has expanded significantly over the last two decades; yet Bangladesh lags behind its neighbors despite its potential. A major obstacle to its tourism growth is crime (Hasan, Ullah, and Chowdhury, 2013). Tuhin and Majumder (2011) identified several barriers to tourism development in Bangladesh, such as political instability, harassment at airports, language issues, conservative social systems, and inadequate infrastructure and policies. These challenges hinder the growth and awareness of the tourism industry in the country. Bangladesh faces significant challenges as a developing nation, with a considerable portion of its population living below the poverty line. Economic challenges, such as recessions, inflation, and unemployment, exacerbate criminal activity, especially within the tourism sector. Severe inequality and low level of education exacerbate the issue, resulting in increased crime rates among the unemployed and disadvantaged populations. (Muzib and Banarjee, 2016). So, it is apparent that, tourism in Bangladesh faces

significant challenges due to political instability, poor managerial skills, social unrest, inadequate services, and lack of infrastructure. Additional issues include insufficient accommodation, food, entertainment, coordination among providers, and security concerns (Rahman et. al, 2010; Ali and Parvin, 2010).

Outstanding service in the tourist industry relies heavily on safety and security, which are crucial for a destination's success. The sector possesses the right to self-defense and should collaborate with governmental and law enforcement agencies to guarantee a safe environment for visitors. Emphasizing security increases the likelihood of survival for the tourism and travel industry (IITTM, nd). Safety and security are critical factors influencing travel choices, as crimes against tourists may damage the locations and the country's reputation and image. A strong reputation for crime prevention and tourist safety is crucial for the tourism industry to succeed. (Ferreira and Harmse, 2000, Glensor and Peak, 2004). Tourism excellence fundamentally depends on guaranteeing the safety and security of tourists, which is vital for a destination's success (WTO, 2016). Recognizing the economic contribution of the tourism sector to Bangladesh, maintaining the safety and security of the tourist locations, and giving tourists a warm, safe, and welcoming environment in which to explore the nation's diversity, the Tourist Police in Bangladesh was established in 2009 (Nordin and Khalid, 2021).

This article is significant to understand the present scenario of Tourist Policing in Bangladesh. The article offers a statutory analysis to identify the challenges of tourist policing and to explore the possible scopes of tourist policing in Bangladesh. For a thoughtful presentation, the article is broadly organized in the following order. Following the introduction, the objectives and methodology of the study were discussed. The subsequent section encompasses the discussion on tourism and crime trends, which is followed by the current status of tourism-oriented policing. The last two sections include a discussion on the challenges of tourist policing in Bangladesh and the scope of tourist policing in Bangladesh. Finally, the study concludes with the way forward to the effective functioning of tourist policing in Bangladesh. So, this study is helpful for policymakers to make effective laws and provisions and as well as Bangladesh Police authority to successfully implement tourist policing in Bangladesh.

1.1 Objectives
This study aims to represent the current status of tourist policing in Bangladesh and to explore the nature and scope of tourist policing in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of this study are as follows,
    i.   To understand the nature of challenges for tourist policing in Bangladesh
    ii.   To figure out the scope of tourist policing in Bangladesh
    iii.   to provide some policy implications for the effective functioning of tourist policing

1.2 Methodology
This article explores the challenges and the scope of tourist policing in Bangladesh. The data for this study was obtained through online searches of peer-reviewed journals, organizational reports, books, and newspaper articles. After a comprehensive desk review of the literature, an analysis was conducted to understand the relative matters of the study. Relevant data was collected and the nature of the data was qualitative. The data have been presented through thematic analysis and graphical representation to understand the challenges and scope of tourist policing. This was followed by providing some recommendations for addressing the challenges and effective implementation of the scopes of tourist policing in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review
2.1 *Tourism and Crime trends throughout the world*
Tourism can increase crime in popular areas by providing local criminals opportunities to exploit tourists for drugs and sex. This situation makes tourists more vulnerable to becoming victims of various crimes, including those committed by organized groups (Pradeep, 2018). Jude in 1975 looked at the connection between crime and tourism in 34 states of Mexico, found that property crimes were more closely linked to tourism than violent crimes. On the other hand, a comprehensive study undertaken in the US refutes the notion that tourism and crime are related. In actuality, crimes involving violence were largely committed by the locals (Pizam, 1982). But a cross- cultural survey found that people believed that tourism increased organized crime (Pizam and Telisman-Kosuta, 1989). Research on tourism and crime examines tourists as offenders and victims, crime rates in tourist areas, the impact of tourism on regional crime, and government crime prevention measures. It also explores the connections between tourism, deviance, and terrorism (Perry and Potgieter, 2013; Kokkinos and Kapardis,

2012). According to Bernasco and Luykx (2003), accessibility and attractiveness are the main factors influencing property crimes.

Tourists are at heightened risk of victimization due to their visibility, unfamiliarity with surroundings, and possession of valuables. There is a growing concern about terrorism specifically targeting tourists and resort areas. Overall, tourists face a greater likelihood of becoming victims compared to locals (Steyn et al. 2009). Tourists may face three main crime categories: economic crimes like fraud, physical crimes including property theft and assault, and psychological crimes such as harassment. Each category poses distinct risks to their safety and well-being. (George, 2003). By comparing the mean crime rates in three tourist locations and two urban centers in New Jersey, Ochrym (1990) found that mean crime rates in tourist locations were significantly higher than in urban centers. McPheters and Stronge (1974) found a significant link between tourism seasonality and increases in theft-related crimes. Boakye (2011) emphasizes that tourists are especially susceptible to crime, frequently more than residents in high-crime areas. The rise in crimes targeting tourists is attributed to several contemporary factors related to tourism development. In addition, the crime rate against tourists fluctuates with the seasons, showing an increase in property-related crimes like robberies during peak travel times and a decrease during off-peak seasons. (McElroy, 1982; De Albuquerque, 1983). There are two main perspectives on the relationship between crime and tourism: one suggests a direct correlation between increased tourist numbers and escalating crime rates, while the other relates crime to the particular types of tourists present. Mass tourism is linked to higher victimization rates, influenced by factors such as ethnicity, age, gender, and nationality. Notably, crimes like thefts and robberies tend to spike during peak tourist seasons. (Pradeep, 2018).

2.2 Tourism and Crime trends in Bangladesh

The potential for tourism to boost the economy of a country is enormous. The industry's growth relies on ensuring safe accommodations and security for travelers (The Daily Sun, May 2022). The rising crime rate poses a significant threat to the tourism industry, with tourists increasingly becoming victims of various crimes. Criminological theories suggest a strong link between crime and tourist destinations, affecting locations like Bangladesh. Consequently, the country has experienced slower growth in tourist visits and a decline in tourism earnings in recent years (Muzib and Banarjee, 2016). Tourist confidence in Bangladesh's travel industry is undermined by security concerns, highlighted by a recent gang-rape incident in Cox's Bazar. With only one police officer for every 1,250 visitors and a total of just 211 tourist police for millions, safety is compromised. Many tourist areas lack adequate law enforcement, and hotels often neglect security measures. Poor administration further exacerbates these issues, prioritizing business over visitor safety (Bonik Barta, March 2022).

The southern tourist hotspots of Bangladesh, including Cox's Bazar and Bandarban, are located in mountainous areas that encounter security issues. The lack of protections and the easy availability of firearms and illicit drugs make these regions susceptible to criminal activity. As a result, numerous tourist destinations experience insufficient security protocols due to a limited law enforcement presence (Muzib and Banarjee, 2016). The gang-rape of a housewife in Cox's Bazar on December 24, 2021, sparked outrage across Bangladesh, highlighting safety concerns in tourism areas. Concerns including as drugs and prostitution have impacted tourist experiences in parks in Dhaka. Moreover, occurrences of theft and violence targeting tourists, such as looting and piracy, have heightened concerns regarding safety in tourist attractions. Overall, these events reflect a broader problem of insecurity in Bangladesh's tourism sector (The Independent, January 2022).

2.3 Tourism-Oriented Policing throughout the world

Tourism-oriented policing (TOPPs) aims to enhance visitor safety and support the tourism industry, differing from traditional law enforcement metrics. In contrast to traditional police, which measure success by solving crimes, TOPPs focuses on the overall tourist experience. This model is first adopted by several English-speaking countries and the United States. However, the tourism sector's influence on policing practices has been limited, particularly noted before and after 9/11 (Tarlow, 2001). The security of tourism is crucial for the stability of the tourism sector, as failures can result in substantial issues. Some countries possess dedicated TOPPs units, whereas others have integrated the TOPPs idea into regular policing practices (Pradeep, 2018).

Security measures in the tourism industry prioritize proactive crime prevention rather than the reactive approach of traditional law enforcement. A tourism safety unit is deemed more effective than a tourism crime unit, focusing on safety rather than solving crimes. However, many stakeholders still view security through a traditional lens, considering it an essential yet often undervalued investment. (Tarlow, 2001). Pradeep (2018) cited that; terrorists may target tourist locations to induce economic instability and create terror. However, they

frequently pursue assets rather than inflict damage on the location. Safeguarding the reputation of the tourism industry is crucial as attacks attract significant media attention and have lasting effects. Thus, tourism policies must adapt to the socio-economic and ecological needs of different locations.

2.4 Tourist Policing in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, Tourist Police is a specialist unit of the Bangladesh Police responsible for ensuring security at tourist attractions and investigating crimes against tourists. Tourist police consider the importance of the tourism sector for Bangladesh's economy and guaranteeing the security and safety of tourist sites. In 2009, the Tourist Police was founded with the goal of providing visitors with a welcoming, secure, and safe atmosphere in which to experience the nation's diversity (Nordin and Khalid, 2021). Tourist Police have pledged to be kind, polite, and hospitable in all tourist locations around the nation with a view to ensuring safety and security, fostering a pleasant environment, boosting confidence, providing legal counsel, preserving biodiversity, and exhibiting the highest level of professionalism (Tourist Police, 2020). The government is undertaking numerous initiatives via the tourist police to safeguard the safety and security of both domestic and international tourists, as well as to enhance economic growth (Hafsa, 2020).

The Tourist Police in Bangladesh are empowered to undertake necessary legal measures to safeguard tourists; to conduct prompt, reliable, and impartial investigations of reported cases; to collect criminal and intelligence data to enhance tourist security and collaborate with relevant police units; to perform regular patrols and monitor criminal activities to facilitate the seamless stay, movement, and travel of tourists; and to provide assistance to the concerned organization dealing with disasters and mishap (Tourist Police, 2020). The Tourist Police Khulna zone consists of five zone offices located in Tungipara, Bagerhat, Sundarbans, Satkhira, and Kushtia, along with a subzone office in Meherpur. From February 2021 to February 2022, the tourist police facilitated the safety of 3,648,523 domestic visitors, 534 international tourists (News Bangla24, 2022). The tourist police in Cox's Bazar have implemented strict measures to prevent harassment of visitors by hotel and cottage owners. These measures include installing CCTV cameras, ensuring staff ID cards, restricting vehicle parking, improving lighting, and regulating access to cottages. Additionally, visitors must provide identification and register upon check-in to enhance security. (The Daily Kaler kantho, August 2022). According to statistics of Tourist Police Headquarters, with a force of 1204 (male-1118 and female-86) staff, Bangladesh tourist police have been working in 55 locations in the country. In order to enhance their capacity, a good number of initiatives have been adopted over time. A specialized training section has conducted 54 workshops, engaging 3545 participants by July 2022. Additionally, two foreign training programs were organized to further improve their skills. An oversight team of 11 members, including various ranks, has been assigned to manage these capacity enhancement efforts (Bangladesh Police, 2020).

3. Discussion

3.1 Challenges of Tourist Policing in Bangladesh

The development of Bangladesh's tourism sector is hampered by visa issues, poor communication infrastructure, security concerns, excessive pricing, harassment, general insecurity, opposition from religious leaders, and social conservatism (The Daily Bhorer Kagoj, June 2022). Afroz and Hasanuzzaman (2012) identified the fear of abduction, fear of the loss of land by local communities, misconceptions about tourism within these communities, conflicts between minor ethnic communities and migrated Bengalis in the hill tracts, unsustainable behaviours by Bengalis and tourists, and sporadic tribal issues as the main challenges to the development of the tourism sector in Bangladesh.

The Tourist Police are facing significant infrastructure issues and a shortage of manpower, leading to concerns about tourist security. Many popular tourist destinations, particularly in the Sonadia, Maheshkhali, Khurushkul, and Himachari districts, lack any police presence, leaving tourists behaviorsfeeling unsafe. Currently, only 135 police officers are stationed in Cox's Bazar city, with a small number assigned to specific subzones, while the majority of tourist attractions remain unprotected. This situation highlights the urgent need for improved security measures to ensure the safety of visitors in these areas (Rtv News, April 2022). Numerous crises are widespread in the Comilla Zone of the Tourist Police, with a limited manpower of only 19 officers covering six districts in the Comilla and Noakhali areas. Their responsibilities include overseeing activities at rental agencies and managing a police truck and motorcycle. Comilla boasts a variety of tourist attractions, including Shalban Vihar, Kutila Mura, Chandramura, Rupban Mura, Itakhola Mura, Satero Rathmura, Ranir Bengalar Pahar, Anand Bazar Palace, Bhoj Rajder Palace, Chandimura, Rajbari, Nazrul Institute, Mainamati Wire Cemetery, Rural Development Academy, Gomti River, Comilla Zoo in Comilla And Botanical Garden, Dharmasagar Park, Comilla Town Hall, Dharmasagar, Lalmai Pahar, Lalmai Botanic Garden, Rajeshpur Ecopark, Ranir Kuthi, Nanua Dighi, Rupsagar Park besides half a hundred entertainment centers and sightseeing places. However, the

tourist police primarily focus their regular duties in just a few areas, namely Kotbari, Shalbon Vihar, and the Museum. This limited operational scope raises concerns about the effectiveness of tourist safety and support in the broader region (Daily Bangladesh, April 2021).

Tourist Police in Bangladesh suffer from a severe manpower shortage, in contrast to the Tourist Zones and tourist sites it served. This unit of police consist of 1,394 personnel, which is supervised by an additional IGP, one DIG, four Addl. DIGs, and 16 SPs. Among the SPs, 11 manage the tourist police districts while the other four are posted at the tourist police headquarters (Tourist Police Bangladesh, 2020). Rahman (2020) found that while many tourist police utilize the internet and social media, their understanding of "e-tourism" and ICT-based tourism is limited, with only 54% being familiar with the term. Furthermore, a mere 3% of the respondents of his study had experience in a cyber-security cell, indicating a lack of advanced ICT training among the police. Overall, only 16% of the participants reported having training in ICT and tourism, highlighting a significant gap in knowledge and skills in this area. The tourist police in Bangladesh face several challenges that hinder their capacity enhancement. These include short-term or temporary assignment at the training division, insufficient training facilities (e.g., rooms, aid, equipment, etc.), a lack of formal documentation (TNA, evaluation, follow-up, database, etc.), the deployment of people without training backgrounds, a lack of appreciation and training benefits (e.g., allowance, promotion scope, service benefits, etc.), and a decrease in the use of professional experts in designing and implementation stages, non-existence of training calendar and training report, cloudy initiative for allied research, lack of ownership and self-driven attitude (Ali, 2020).
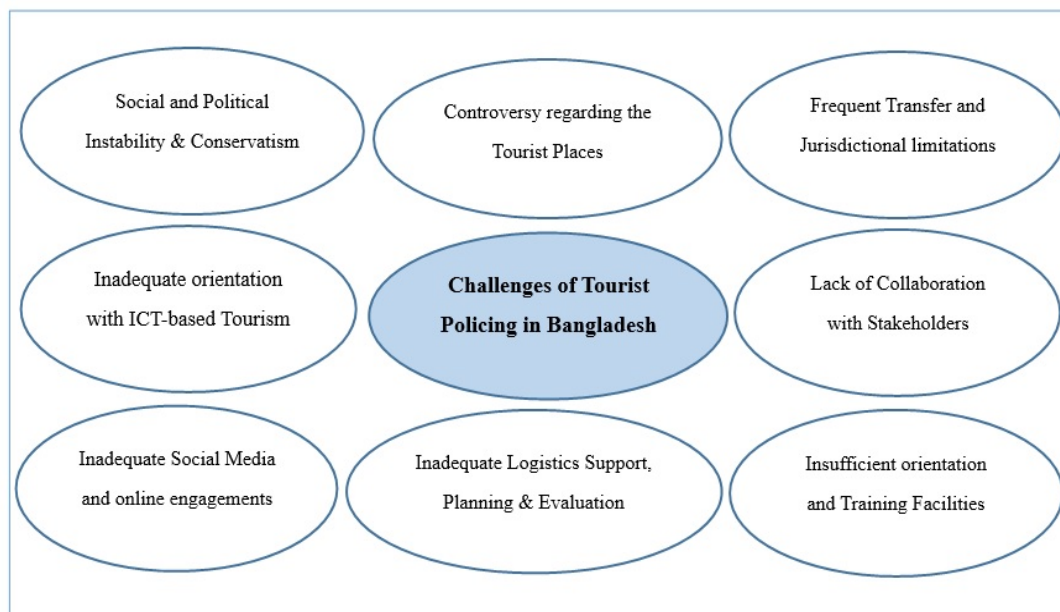

Figure 1: Challenges of Tourist Policing in Bangladesh

To enhance tourism, the effectiveness of tourist police must be improved through better infrastructure and logistical support. Adequate funding is essential for safety measures such as CCTV cameras, signboards, and billboards to ensure tourist security. The jurisdiction of the tourism police should extend to billboards created by advertising firms and hotel-motel associations. Monitoring these initiatives requires significant resources and costs. Tourist police officials emphasize the need for executive magistrates to be part of their team, as the lack of magistracy support has hindered their operations. This absence has prevented the tourist police from utilizing mobile courts in Cox's Bazar for the past 1.5 years, making it imperative to address this issue promptly. Tourist police also face numerous challenges in safeguarding visitors, such as issues with online bookings, credit card fraud, and criminal activities like covert video recording and drug trafficking. Additionally, there are concerns about the exploitation of street food vendors and theft of personal belongings. The lack of tourist police presence and inadequate infrastructure further complicate the safety of tourists in the region (Rahman, 2020). The role of tourist police is crucial in supporting and safeguarding the tourism industry, highlighting the need for comprehensive training (Wallace, 2020). In the modern era, it is essential for tourist police to be well-trained to create a welcoming atmosphere for guests. They should also adhere to high moral and ethical standards while

being equipped to handle crimes involving tourists. Additionally, being multilingual, particularly in English, is important for effective communication and assistance (Payam, 2020).

3.2 Scope of Tourist Policing in Bangladesh
3.2.1 Tourist Police as a Builder of Strong Brand Image of Tourist Places
Tourism police units are established to prevent crime and disturbances related to tourism, but the police do not usually initiate them. They should be considered as part of a broader strategy involving various stakeholders in the travel industry rather than a standalone solution (Mawby et al. 2014). So, the Tourist Police is a mechanism that guards against dangers and threats to tourists' lives and property. They are specialized police who work to protect and secure tourists (Payam, 2016). The perception of security and safety among tourists is essential for a nation's competitiveness in the global tourism sector. Alongside unique attractions, travelers' confidence can enhance a country's reputation as a desirable travel destination (Norfarah and Siti-Nabiha, 2021). Therefore, the idea behind tourist police is that the government, tourism industry, law enforcement, and tourists collaborate in innovative and strategic ways to assist address safety and security issues at tourist attractions (Wallace, 2020). Therefore, tourist police in Bangladesh can work as a builder of strong brand image of tourist places by preventing crime and ensuring a sense of security.

3.2.2 Tourist Police as an Enhancer of Collaboration with Stakeholders
Tourism destinations are acknowledged as having complicated governance settings, because so many different, sometimes rival stakeholder groups are engaged in creating and providing tourist goods and services, (Islam, Ruhanen and Ritchie, 2018). The tourist police in Bangladesh collaborate with nearly 20 ministries and 60 departments, as well as various associations related to the tourism sector, including tour operators and hotel owners. This collaboration is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of the police and the tourism industry. To build the capacity of these stakeholders, activities such as consultation meetings, seminars, and participation in cultural and sporting events are essential (Ali, 2022). The interaction between the visitor and other stakeholders is established by the tourist police, which is unique from other types of policing (Tyagi, Dhar and Sharma, 2016). Therefore, a special and distinctive capacity improvement project is required to set apart tourist police from other security/police personnel (Obieluem, Anozie and Nwankwo, 2016). Thus, effective collaboration with stakeholders can be possible by effective functioning of tourist police in Bangladesh.

3.2.3 Tourist Police as an Enhancer of Tourist's Confidence
According to SAT (2007), According to SAT (2007), foreign source markets especially North America and Western Europe, view South Africa as a safe tourist destination, although perceptions of crime significantly influence tourist decisions. Tourist confidence is greatly affected by the quality of facilities, equipment, and service staff, with modern equipment and visible tourist police presence being key factors. A positive police service culture, effective communication, and responsiveness to tourist needs also enhance this confidence. Tourists prioritize attributes such as police assistance, respect, transparency, and honest behavior from police staff, which contribute to their confidence in tourism-related policing. This trust is largely influenced by the training and socialization processes that instill values of honesty and good conduct in tourist police officers (Norfarah and Siti-Nabiha, 2021). Responsiveness of tourist police significantly boosts the confidence of foreign tourists, as it encompasses their accessibility, courteousness, and knowledge of local guidelines. Additionally, quick action in addressing issues raised by tourists is also highly valued by respondents (Sarrico et al., 2013). In this way, prompt and effective response of tourist police can enhance tourist's confidence in Bangladesh.

3.2.4 Tourist Police as a Savior of Eco-tourism and Ensure Responsible Tourism
Responsible Tourism (RT) focuses on the impact of tourism on people, natural resources, and societies. It aims to benefit host communities, improve working conditions, and promote sustainable environmental practices while highlighting cultural resources. RT encourages understanding of local issues, minimizes negative impacts, and maximizes economic benefits for locals. Additionally, it involves local participation in decision-making and enhances visitor experiences by fostering connections with the community (Leslie, 2012; Goodwin, 2014). An important element of ensuring responsible tourism is measuring and tracking visitors' responsible conduct (RT). There is a substantial correlation between behavioral trait themes and responsible tourist behavior (RTB) (environmental, economic, cultural, development and promotional, legal and ethical behavioral traits) (Alam et. al, 2021). Behavioral traits and local rules are crucial for sustainable tourism development, promoting environmental protection and involving local customs and law enforcement (Shahzalal, 2016). Therefore, by

raising awareness among tourists and keeping an eye on their movements, tourist police may be a useful counterpart to ensuring Responsible Tourist Behavior in Ecotourism Destinations and can play significant roles as a savior of Eco- tourism (Alam et. al, 2021).

3.2.5 Digitalization in Tourism Security

The Smart Tourist Security System (STSS) is a novel initiative in Bangladesh aimed at enhancing the safety of visitors through information technology. A survey revealed that 29.4% of international tourists feel that security measures in the country need improvement. The proposed smartphone-based system utilizes GPS and GPRS to provide essential services to tourists and law enforcement agencies. This system will enable travelers to find safe routes and contact local authorities during emergencies (Hasan et al. 2016). In Bangladesh, most tourist police are not sufficiently trained in ICT-based tourism, but 85% believe that such training would enhance their ability to protect tourists. Therefore, the digitalization of tourist policing and the integration of ICT in tourism are crucial for improving safety and preventing crime in tourist areas (Rahman, 2020).

4. Conclusion: Policy Implications

Crimes against tourism might impede tourism since they seriously damage a location's reputation. The safety and security of the tourists is one of the essential conditions for the long-term, sustainable growth of the tourism industry and for this, keeping crime down and assuring tourists' safety is the most important prerequisite for a healthy tourism industry. Tourist Police in Bangladesh is authorized to take the necessary legal action to ensure the safety of tourists, to guarantee prompt, trustworthy, and impartial investigation of cases received for investigation, to gather criminal and intelligence information to ensure the security of tourists, to guarantee routine patrols and surveillance of criminals for the smooth stay, movement, and travels of tourists. The Current study explores the issues and challenges of tourist policing in Bangladesh. It is obvious that, controversy regarding the tourist places in Bangladesh, numerous infrastructure problems and a manpower shortage at the tourist police, inadequate logistics support, planning and evaluation, short-term or temporary posting at the tourist police, the deployment of people without training backgrounds to tourist police, inadequate orientation with ICT-based tourism, inadequate social media and online engagements, and social and political instability and conservatism is the challenges to successful functioning of tourist police in Bangladesh.

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