

10th ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers' Meeting
[4-5 February, Yogyakarta, Indonesia]

Substantial Remarks by the Ambassador

Mr. Chairman, Ministers and ladies & gentlemen,

Hospitality sector including tourism was one of the worst hit sectors by the Covid-19 related pandemic. The incoming tourists from India which were 4.71 million in 2019 reduced considerably by 2021. Of course, since the overall tourism to and from India increased last year, we are slowly moving towards restoration of the two-way traffic of tourists to the pre-Covid dates.

Even within ASEAN, the tourism has really picked up well with a few countries. Vietnam is one of them. Bilateral tourism has reached almost the same number as that of pre-pandemic era. The main reason for the growth of tourism is pro-active steps taken by Governments especially in starting direct air-linkages, the frequency of which has reached 22 flights per week between a number of destinations in India and Vietnam. This gives confidence that sooner than later we shall be able to restore the two-way tourism with all the ASEAN Member States.

The second important factor in determining tourism flow is ease of obtaining visa. I am very happy to share with you that Government of India has extended e-visa facilities to all ASEAN Member States. The e-visas include, tourism visa, business visa and medical visa. Let me inform the hon'ble Ministers that many of them come to India for medical purpose. We know that some of the ASEAN Member States have excellent medical facilities, but we want to let you know that our doors are open for healing in India.

Let me inform the august gathering about one of the projects in which my Government is involved. The ASEAN came up with a proposal titled ASEAN Cultural Heritage List, which is basically enlisting on the pattern of UNESCO, cultural sites in ASEAN, which because of procedural and other matters do not find place in the UNESCO World Heritage List despite being of immense historical, cultural and civilizational value. I am confident that once that listing is done, it shall help give push to tourism to those sites.

Another initiative which is at the idea stage, and which fits into our work programme, which is subject to the approval by my own Ministries and the ASEAN, is the exchange of tour operators. We thought that once the policies are made user friendly it is very important to give exposure to the tour-operators to each others' countries.

All of us know that after successfully completing its G20 presidency, H.E. President Joko Widodo passed on the G20 baton to Hon'ble PM of India Shri Narendra Modi in Bali in November 2022. During the India presidency Government of India has extended invitation to ASEAN as a guest. Thus, when Indonesia participates in its own capacity as a member of G-20, it shall also represent ASEAN and we are confident that it shall share ASEAN perspectives too. There shall be some meeting on tourism sector as well. Invitations are also being extended to the ASEAN Secretariat to as many meetings as possible.

Tourism is not only sightseeing, it is about familiarizing oneself with tradition and culture of other countries, understanding them deeply, and in some cases connecting at different levels, as we often experience while visiting the ASEAN countries. Tourism also helps India on creating jobs, promoting small and medium industry domestically and attracts Foreign Direct Investment. In fact, India has a policy of allowing 100 per cent FDI in the tourism sector. My colleague has already mentioned about the Tourism Investment forum being planned in April this year, we would very much like to see participation from the ASEAN Member States.

India has taken a number of initiatives by using digital technologies to popularize tourism both domestically and globally. In order to connect stakeholders in the tourism eco-system digitally, we have launched "The National Digital Tourism Mission (NDTM)". To name a few, we have also launched the upgraded version of National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry (NIDHI); Festival Portal, etc. A special focus is given on responsible tourism. Last year, National Summit on Developing Sustainable & Responsible Tourist Destinations was organized twice in India in New Delhi on 04 June 2022 in partnership with United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Subsequently, the second regional workshop was organized at Kolkata on 11th January, 2023 in association with UNEP, Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM), and Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI).

At policy level, we have formulated a National Strategy and Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism. On similar lines, National Strategy for Adventure Tourism has also been formulated. New National Policy on Tourism shall be announced any time in the near future.

Under the work plan, we should be able to find ways and means to share experience on the above policies and portals; workshops and conferences, ideas and concepts.

Thanks for your patient hearing.
