

Vibrant Villages Programme aimed at enhancing infrastructure in villages along India's border with China has been showing great results in bringing up employment opportunities for the residents of these villages, said Mr. Arvind Singh (IAS), Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

While addressing the industry stakeholders at the release of PHDCCI White Paper on Border Tourism, Mr. Arvind Singh (IAS), Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, mentioned that the recovery of India's tourism post Covid can be witnessed through the whooping number of tourists (approximately 20 lakhs), who visited the state of Jammu & Kashmir till October 2022.

As most of the countries of Asia Pacific opened up a little late post Covid as a preventive measure, we are still going slow on global tourists coming into India, affecting our inbound numbers but we have been able to revive strongly due to our rapid vaccination drive and prompt Government action for opening up to the globe attracting foreign tourists, added Mr. Singh.

The Government has consciously decided on having more than 200 meetings over 55 different locations across the country to showcase India's strong tourism and cultural heritage. This gives us an opportunity to present our beautiful destinations to the globe, added Mr. Singh.

He further highlighted that the Government has been funding a lot of border security projects for further development. The Vibrant Villages Programme aimed at enhancing infrastructure in villages along India's border with China has been showing great results in bringing up employment opportunities for the residents of these villages and better quality of infrastructure to reduce the level of migrations away from the villages due to no source of income, lack of employment opportunities and low quality infrastructure.

Secretary Tourism congratulated PHDCCI for an effective White Paper on Border Tourism and mentioned that such a report has not been undertaken by any organisation till now and the inputs of the report will surely aid the government in further decision making.

Mr. Harpreet Singh (IPoS), Joint Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER), Government of India, mentioned that tourism continues to be an important sector for the Indian economy and majority of the infrastructure development projects undertaken by the Government are towards the tourism sector.

He further stated that the 8 states of NER comprising 8% of the area of the country and close to 4% of the population has huge potential for tourism but it still has only 0.3% share of domestic tourists and 0.93% share of the foreign tourists. There holds immense potential which needs to be tapped in the NE region through effective infrastructure development and better connectivity, added Mr. Singh.

The Government has decided to constitute a Tourism Taskforce for development of Indian tourism and PHDCCI will play an integral part in giving the sectorial inputs. In the upcoming Suraj Kund Mela, the Government will showcase the tourism, art and culture of the North East states of India, added Mr. Singh.

Mr. Rama Kamaraju, Senior Consultant – Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP), NITI Aayog, said that it would be the perfect idea to combine the results of the Aspirational Districts Programme of the Government and the PHDCCI White Paper and try to move forward for the development of Border Tourism in the districts and villages of the country.

The ADP initiated by NITI Aayog has yielded good results in improving the socio economic parameters in the selected districts and showing further progress. The Government is working towards developing a robust and strong infrastructure in the border areas for attracting increased number of tourists, added Mr. Kamaraju.

In his presidential address, Mr. Saket Dalmia, President, PHDCCI, said that when G20 came to India, all Indians were made to think of what is unique in India that can be showcased to the world during India's G-20 Presidency. That is when all Indians realised that our country houses one of the finest tourism destinations which carry a legacy and rich cultural heritage.

India has beautiful borders shared by the neighbouring countries which carry unique serenity and we are set to showcase this beauty during India's G-20 Presidency. Border Tourism is just a cluster of ideas and thought put together by PHDCCI for development of our borders through better access along with quality infrastructure to showcase it to the world, added Mr. Dalmia.

This White Paper on Border Tourism by PHDCCI highlights the challenges of each border destination and provides ample scope and opportunities towards promotion of Border Tourism in the country, said Mr. Dalmia.

Dr. Deep Goel, Chair– Hospitals, Diagnostics & Wellness Committee, PHDCCI, mentioned that the Government should look at developing Indian villages and then reach out to them with medical services. The Indian doctors and nurses are valued all over the world and once we develop these scenic places through better and developed infrastructure, Medical Tourism can be introduced to these destinations as it is a low hanging fruit, added Dr. Goel.

Mr. Rajan Sehgal, Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI, mentioned that the Tourism & Hospitality Committee of PHDCCI with the support of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has launched its Border Tourism Webinar Series with a view to explore the tourism potential in the border districts of India. Mr. Sehgal assured the Government of full support from PHDCCI in developing tourism and showcasing its potential during India's G-20 presidency.

Mr. Dushyant Bhalla, Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI, mentioned that Border Tourism lets us explore the places where one can almost see the boundary disappear into another country.

Mr. Saurabh Sanyal, CEO & Secretary General, PHDCCI, in his concluding remarks mentioned that the problem of border districts and tourism development is recognized as an important challenge for local communities along the border. Although institutional environment and security barriers remain the stumbling block for entrepreneurial cooperation; conditions for Border Tourism enhancement can be enabled through setting up frameworks for easier cooperation of public, private and civil actors. Mr. Sanyal mentioned

that with better infrastructure facilities, India can have 21 Wonders as against the 7 Wonders of the World.

*The session was moderated by **Dr. Yogesh Srivastav, Assistant Secretary General, PHDCCI** and attended by over 100 delegates that included senior Government officials, Ambassadors, Trade Commissioners, Academicians, Tour Operators, Hoteliers and Students from the Tourism & Hospitality Management Institutes.*

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