

India signs MoU on cooperation in the field of tourism

Minister of State for Tourism Renuka Chowdhury led a high level delegation to Afghanistan for a three-day visit from December 6 to 8, 2005. Accompanying her were Amitabh Kant, Joint Secretary (Tourism), A.S. Saxena, Assistant Director, India Tourism Office in Dubai, Kuldeep Verma, General Manager, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), and Y.M. Pande, Additional PS to the Minister.

The three-decade conflict has destroyed much of Afghanistan's cultural and historical heritage, including the Bamiyan Buddhas. Earlier, Afghanistan was a popular tourist destination for Westerners and people from the region. Abundant natural beauty, warm and friendly people with a tradition of hospitality, and a tolerant approach to life made Kabul an attractive city. Sadly, today there is a complete lack of infrastructure and also of trained manpower.

A bilateral MoU on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism was signed by Afghan Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, and Minister of State for Tourism Renuka Chowdhury. The MoU provides a framework for undertaking projects and establishes a Joint Working Group.

Minister of State for Tourism Chowdhury called on first Vice-President Ahmed Zia Massoud and visited the neighbouring Province of Kapisa where she was received by Governor Abdul Sattar Murad. On a clear blue morning, on the banks of the Panjsher river, Governor Murad spoke about Kapisa's rich historical legacy. During the Kushan peri-



Afghan Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, left, shaking hands with Minister of State for Tourism Renuka Chowdhury, right, after signing a bilateral MoU on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism. Standing behind at centre is Ambassador of India to Afghanistan Rakesh Sood. Also seen, partially hidden, is Deputy Tourism Minister Stanekzai.

od, Kapisa was the summer capital and a number of archaeological sites have yielded rich evidence of life and society of that period.

Following detailed official-level talks, both sides have identified a number of projects to be taken up in the coming six months. These include Indian trainers coming to Kabul to train travel agents and tour operators in ticketing and interested Afghans visiting India for training in the hospitality sector. Using material to be provided by Afghanistan, the Indian Tourism Department will help develop a promotional brochure on Afghanistan which can be made use of by Afghan Embassies all over the world.

Both sides also agreed that a special exhi-

bition on Afghanistan will be organized in Delhi in March 2006 highlighting Afghanistan's history, culture, customs and handicrafts. Simultaneously, Indian designers will work with Afghan craftsmen in order to develop and diversify the product range in a contemporary manner.

To assist the Afghan Government in setting up of a Hospitality Management Training Centre, India will help prepare a feasibility study for the project.

Dr. Raheen complimented Minister of State for Tourism Chowdhury on her success in promoting tourism and hoped that with Indian help, there could also be a successful campaign of 'Incredible Afghanistan!' ■

Excerpts from the Plan of Action agreed on by the two governments for the implementation on the MoU on tourism signed during the Minister's visit.

PLAN OF ACTION

A) Capacity Building

- (i) The Ashok Institute of Hospitality and Tourism Management... will undertake a two week crash course in Hospitality Management for waiters, chefs and managers in Kabul during 2005-06...
- (ii) Government of Afghanistan will identify 10 skilled Trainers who will be trained under a "Train the Trainers" programme by the National Council for Hotel Management & Catering Technology...
- (iii) A... crash course in ticketing and reservation for private sector travel agents and tour operators of Afghanistan.
- (iv) Afghan tours operators will visit India (on) a familiarisation trip...

- (B) Publicity and Marketing:** ...India Tourism will design, print and publish a world class Brochure and CD with visuals on Afghanistan.
- (C)** ...India will invite 10 leading journalists/tour operators on

familiarization trip...

(D) ...A unique Exhibition on Afghanistan (to be held) in New Delhi and other Metro cities of India (Mumbai/Hyderabad/Chennai). The exhibition will include:

- i. Handicrafts by Women...;
- ii. Food festival on Afghan Cuisine...;
- iii. Workshop of Indian and Afghan Master Craftsmen...

(E) ...Ministry of Tourism will provide consultancy and technical assistance for preparation of a Master Plan for one unique tourism site in Afghanistan which can serve as a model...

(F) ...India will organise the visit of a private sector delegation (to interact) with their local counterparts and (for) investing in the growing and expanding tourism sector of Afghanistan.

(G) ... Ministry of Tourism will get a Feasibility Report prepared... for establishment of an Institute of Hospitality Management and Catering Technology (in) Afghanistan...

6. ...A Joint Working Group for effective implementation of the provision of the MoU has been set up. ■