GUREZ BECKONS TOURISTS AS NEW AREAS OPEN IN KASHMIR

Tourism is now getting the Red Carpet treatment
NAKUL ANAND
Executive Director, ITC Hotels and Chairman, FAITH

Tourism must coexist and grow in Harmony with Nature
ASHOK LAVASA
Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change

Number One position is based on total recall of a destination
ASHWANI LOHANI
Principal Secretary Tourism and MD, MPTDC

Outsourced visa services are cost-effective and traveller friendly
ZUBIN KARKARIA
CEO, VFS Global Group

Bangladesh: Bilateral push opens new vistas for tourism in the region
St Regis checks into Palladium in Mumbai, its first property in India
Children of a lesser God in tourism business

It is clearly one of those 'known-unknown' facts which often fail to shake the general mindscape as much as the gravity of the situation. But host of research works underline that Child Sex Tourism (CST) has registered a rampant rise in the country and an effective deterrent mechanism is yet to emerge.

If the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (19th century) had to review the situation and give his verdict, he may come back strongly saying, "Didn't I tell you? God is dead." For the reality is probably so grim that the unpleasant principles of nihilism (in the general sense) at once become the encompassing force. In a country which believes in welcoming its guests with open arms equating them with "Deva" (remember that Atithi Devo Bhava punchline), some of them could well be just opposite to your expectations, absolute Danavas (demons). Skin colour notwithstanding (they could be international or domestic), these sexual deviants in the guise of tourists have added an underbelly to the tourism business feeding on the economic depravity of a particular section from where they are picking up juvenile victims. Going by some studies undertaken in the recent years by some notable civil society agencies and also the government bodies, the sexual exploitation of children in Indian tourism is on a rise. But disquieting fact is: the response to the problem that when it comes to sexual crime, its not only women who are unsafe but children too are at high risk in a general sense. Especially those who do not enjoy a normal childhood due to poverty and are forced to become a part of the workforce at a very tender age. It may be startling to many but the fact is that about one-tenth of the country's total workforce comprise children (below the age of 18) mostly eking out a living in the unorganized sector. And it is this section which is the most vulnerable. "Despite its claims to non-violence, tolerance, spirituality and a new trillion-dollar economy, India has the largest number of sexually abused children in the world. The procurement of children for exploitation are well organised rackets, be it traffickers, procurers, pimps or brothel operators," says a report.

The findings of a national study on Child Abuse commissioned by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) in April 2007 (covering 13 states with a sample size of 12,446 children) had created quite a stir when it revealed that over half the surveyed ism in 1991 when six men were accused of sexually abusing downtrodden children at an orphanage run by Freddy Albert Peats in Goa. They hailed from countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Germany. However, only Peats was sentenced, as the others managed to flee the country. And since then there have been a host of studies (undertaken both by civil agencies as well as different government departments) which underline that the problem has maintained a consistent multiplying trajectory. In the process, a lot of myths have been broken ranging from this being restricted to specific beach locations like Goa or to male children being outside its ambit.

Bangalore-based EQUATIONS (Equitable Tourism Options), a leading NGO working on the impacts of tourism, had conducted a study in 2002 titled Coastal Sex Tourism and Gender, commissioned by the National Commission for Women (NCW), which had highlighted the prevalence of child sexual abuse and prostitution.

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- However, a 2006 report by International Labour Organization (ILO) had estimated 15 per cent of India's 2.3 million commercial sex workers to be children.

is either of complete denial or preference is shown to keep it "hush, hush."

No, nobody is blaming tourism as such for aggravating a problem which is truly global in nature. If the issue has to be analyzed within the larger framework of cause and effect theory, then tourism's contribution is clearly aligned to the latter. The real issue today probably seems to be acknowledging the problem and then taking it to the desired end before some atious stigma sticks in.

Children are unsafe too

But before turning the attention to the issue of child sex abuse triggered from tourism quarters, here is the larger picture which underlines children (53%) had been sexually abused. The report stated that more boys (72.6%) than girls (65%) were harmed and 21 per cent of the children reported severe abuse. The most affected were children at work (61% reported sexual abuse) and street children (54%) were highly vulnerable to sexual abuse. The central message which had emerged from the report was: the Indian children, especially those working, are increasingly becoming vulnerable to sexual crimes and the pattern is simply profession agnostic, not a single sector can be blamed.

Dark scenes within Tourism confines

India had woken to the reality of child sex tourism in Puri and the report contained enough evidence to suggest male child sexual abuse as well. The agency had come out with another report in 2003 titled Situational Analysis of Child Sex Tourism in India (Goa and Kerala) (the study was commissioned by the noted global body ECPAT (International NGO which keeps a tab on children exploitation), and had reported a rise in prostitution and trafficking in women and children for the purposes of sex tourism and labour. The study also revealed that child-sex tourism was facilitated with the help of intermediaries who assisted tourists in accessing the children, such as with local hotels and lodges, tour operators, former
"The Safe and Honourable Tourism Code should be activated"

Lalit Panwar, Secretary Tourism, Government of India

That is the big thing. to what extent are we aware or need to be aware of the incidents of child abuse. My bigger question, is tourism actually a part of it, or is it a more societal, poverty or environmental issue?

This code of conduct, safe and honourable tourism was signed by the main service providers of our travel industry. Misuse or abuse of children is reported in other parts of the world as well as Thailand. In fact, paedophiles have been chased out of some countries and concerned governments have come down heavily on them. I would say, though I am yet to see the recommendations of the committee that you are talking about, but now that you have mentioned this point I will call for them and see them, but yes as the ministry of tourism we also have a role to play. This means that there are other players also who should be playing their role. Because when it comes to child abuse there are other government agencies that also come into play. Of course tourism will also be there. Because if the abuse is by an international or domestic tourist then it involves us but if the abuse is by a local then other enforcement agencies come into play.

But yes, the ministry’s policy has been to promote sustainable and honourable tourism and there was a code of conduct signed. But I don’t think that something substantial has been achieved on the ground. It still remains a statement of intent and pious ideas. On the ground level, I think people from the Ministry, travel fraternity and the media they will have to play their own part.

My industry would not tolerate this kind of abuse in any way. The first instance of such a thing coming to our knowledge will be reported to the police and concerned authorities.

I am presuming that when it comes to exports of good, when international buyers come, they insist on a certification that child labour has not been used while making this product. This has to be certified. I am wondering if any such certification is possible within this area of child abuse, that we have an industry that is certified to have been educated into the possibilities of such abuse. Our attitude should be clearly to state and certify that we do not tolerate child abuse.

There is an opinion that much of this exploitation is possible because of poverty levels in society. That vulnerable sections in society fall prey to the lure of money and gifts. That over a period of time, cartels come into being playing on such elements. Is there a possibility that our organized industry can create educational forums where children close to commonly identified tourist areas can be alerted to such dangers. Can tourism become a channel whereby sensitive advertising can be introduced close to beaches, entertainment centres, so that everybody stands alerted.

We can take a lead. In Khajuraho, for example, as this is one tourist city you said was named in the report, we can request the state tourism department to conduct some diagnostics. Once you have done this then it is easier to create a blueprint for action. Ideally, the administration and the industry should join hands in launching a campaign on such social awareness. First we should get a pathological diagnosis with sociological ramifications. You have rightly observed that the temptation would be poverty. Would you like to say something specifically for tourism?

I think that the code we worked upon some years ago should be activated and there should be more discussion on the subject. That way ECO Society has done a good job. They have been able to create some ecological awareness. In addition to ecological awareness, this is sociological awareness which should be looked at. I think the ministry, the administration and the industry should come together. Since it is endemic and not epidemic, so endemic could be handled at the endemic level itself in a concentrated way.

By NAVIN BERRY

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victims of paedophiles serving as procurers, beach boys, 'pilots' or motorcycle taxi drivers, and shack owners. In 2004, an article penned by Sairam Bhat of National Law University (which had created quite a flutter) on the issue of children in Goa reported that the state is now witnessing an alarming rise in sexual abuse against children in the 7-16 age group. The arrests and investigations by social groups revealed that more than 10,000 paedophiles visit the coastal state every year and molest children, especially brought in for the trade from Karnataka.

Another study commissioned by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in 2006 on Trafficking of Women and Children in India had provided further evidence of the growing phenomena of child-sex tourism in pilgrim, coastal tourism and most major tourist destinations such as Kerala, Delhi, Agra-UP, Jaipur-Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Pondicherry. The study also noted that the beaches of Goa and Kovalam were increasingly becoming destinations for those seeking child prostitutes.

In 2006, ECPAT commissioned a study on the prostitution of boys in South Asia which indicated that prostitution of boys is an emerging problem in tourism destinations such as India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. "Male child exploitation occurs in locales such as streets, markets, bus terminals, hotels, restaurants and religious establishments. A large number of boys living on the streets are victims of sexual exploitation, and the average age of boys being forced into exploitation is approximately 12.5 years or younger," the report had earmarked.

In 2007, a Institute of Social Sciences study had reiterated that Kerala is slowly turning into a hub of child-sex tourists. The study stated that hoteliers in areas such as Alappuzha and Ernakulam promote sex
"It isn’t easy to make Responsible Tourism Code mandatory”

Sujit Banerjee, Secretary General, WTTC India Chapter

In all honesty, it was ITB Berlin show in 2010 which had opened my eyes, making me realize the dimension of sexual exploitation of children in the tourism business. I was attending the show as tourism secretary and had attended a seminar on this issue at the venue which featured international experts as well as some representatives from India. What they narrated was extremely appalling not just for any specific country but the entire world. The deliberations also aptly focused on how this problem has snowballed in a country like ours.

It was quite disturbing to know that our country is also recognised as one of the hotbeds of child sex tourism and back here in India, I had immediately taken up the issue with the then Tourism Minister Kamari Shailja. She too was quite taken aback and asked me to do something urgently on this. Though there were only three months left in my tenure, in the limited time my team did make a serious effort to put together a set of guidelines aiming to raise the awareness level on this critical issue and rope in the stakeholders to take some responsibility in curbing this menace. We had immediately convened a workshop where international experts were also invited to help in solution finding. I particularly remember the presentation made by the representatives from Australia and New Zealand who displayed how technology can be effectively used in terms of the linkage of the stakeholders with the law and order machinery to make agile moves to check sexual crime against children.

Time constraint notwithstanding, we had managed to put together a specific guideline which was called Safe and Responsible Tourism code (it was unveiled after my retirement). For this we had taken inputs from a number of reputed agencies like Save the Children India, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, PATA India Chapter, etc. The code called for a pledge by all stakeholders in the business to indulge in responsible practices which included working collectively to check the sexual exploitation of children and women in the trade. The pledge was the first step in sensitizing and taking the awareness level to a new high.

The code also talked about bringing in place more effective monitoring mechanism and more importantly a training module which should permeate to the bottom of the services value chain. When we were working on this guideline, we were probably so much carried away by the zeal to make a difference that we had even proposed setting up a dedicated security unit – Tourism Security & Facilitation Organisation (TSFO). Though not many knew about this proposition, the basic idea was to bring in personnel from other security forces and form a unit which will ensure that tourism business stays clear from all kinds of anomalies including sexual exploitation of children.

Initially, some stakeholders had taken the pledge. But things have not really unfolded the way it was envisaged because it didn’t get the seriousness it deserved. I am often asked why the code was not made mandatory? With tourism not being in the concurrent list, I don’t think it is easy to make it mandatory.

The issue certainly needs more attention and it calls for a more pro-active approach. If I have to do it afresh, I will certainly advise setting up a dedicated monitoring agency which should be manned mostly by women staff and officers since they happen to be more sensitive to such issues. There is also scope of bringing in more technology in both monitoring and training.

As told to RITWIK SINHA

tourism because such services bring in extra income. In the same year, a situational assessment report prepared by Global Humanitarian and Action Pour Les Enfants on the sexual exploitation of children in the town of Puris had reported that “Puris a place frequently visited by sex offenders who also visit other places in Orissa (Gopalpur on Sea, Chilika Lake, Konark) and other Indian states.” In 2007, then Women and Child Development Minister Renaka Chowdhury had revealed in the Lok Sabha that studies conducted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) show that sexual exploitation of children is quite widespread in pilgrim, heritage and coastal tourism areas.

In 2008-2009, there was another startling revelation furnished by a joint report of EQUATIONS and ECPAT International focusing on male children in prostitution in three of India’s major pilgrimage centres – Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Puri in Orissa and Guruvayoor in Kerala. The study had found that in these centres, tourism development without protective measures has led to sexual exploitation of children, in the form of child abuse, child trafficking, child prostitution, child pornography, child sex tourism and child labour.

The most recent study conducted by Bhopal-based Vikas Samvad and EQUATIONS last year focusing on Khajuraho and Ujjain reported that, “there is an increase in crimes against children, missing and trafficked children, child labour and child sexual abuse though this sorry state of affairs remains unquestioned by the government officials.”

Magnitude of the problem

The findings of the above-mentioned reports (including those commissioned by government bodies) clearly underline that the awareness...
about the problem is not exactly in the cold storage. However, an effective combating mechanism to control this rising menace is also not exactly out in the open. “What I could tell you is that it is reaching to an alarming proportion especially in states like Goa, Kerala, Andhra, Odisha and MP too. Tourism business is growing and, therefore, it is also giving a push to child sex tourism which mostly happens in the form of consented exploitation,” says Sachin Jain, Director, Vikas Sanvad. “Child sex tourism is not specific to Goa. Incidents have been reported from different parts of the country including Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu, Mumbai, Pune and Kollapur in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Puri in Orissa and coastal Kerala,” adds Nishtha Desai, Director, Children’s Rights in Goa.

There has, however, not been any single study which can draw the larger picture of this problem on a pan-Indian basis. “No agency has ever done any countrywide study on child sex tourism. Most of the studies have focused on specific locations, in analyzing the trends in qualitative terms rather than quantitative,” informs Aditi Chanchanani, Director, EQUATIONS. However, a 2006 report by International Labour Organization (ILO) had estimated 15 per cent of India’s 2.3 million commercial sex workers to be children. “They are sexually exploited in brothels, massage parlours, nightclubs, beauty salons, hotels, escort services, private houses known as ‘madhu charkas’ as well as at railway stations, bus stations, streets and public parks,” the report had stated.

Non-banal attitude: The Main Culprit?
This seems to be the crux of the problem for failing to arrest the rising menace of child-sex tourism. Observers point out a host of factors for its ascendency ranging from longer stays of the perpetrators owing to India being a cheap destination to an expanding tribe of consenting victims who are looking at it as convenient route for their subsistence. Not to forget, the entire network of intermediaries – pimps, hotel staff, auto drivers – who have come up at noted tourist destinations. “The fact of the matter is most of child prostitutes come from the lowest strata. And nobody cares about them. So the business is thriving. In Khajuraho, we have noticed some homestays where sexually deviant tourists are coming and staying for long duration. But the local administration is turning a blind eye to it,” Jain points out. “You talk to authorities in religious destinations and they will tell you that the visitors come for the darshan of the deity and not sex. At the grass root level, people seem to be in denial mode conveniently. And if children are being sexually exploited at spiritual places (which are meant to be ‘sacred’), imagine what could be the case of destinations popular more for fun and profligate,” Aditi says.

It is not that the union government has given a complete go by to the need of clipping the expanding wings of child sex tourism. In 2010, a specified Code of Conduct for Safe and Honourable Tourism was put in practice which, among other things, was also driven by the objective to “aid the prevention of prostitution, sex tourism and forms of sexual exploitation like assaults and molestations in tourism to safeguard this menace for past many decades. UNWTO is running a programme called “Protect Children from Exploitation in Travel and Tourism” which was formally launched in 2008. Earlier, UNWTO along with ECPAT had put in place a global Code of Conduct against the sexual exploitation of children. As of April 2013, more than 1200 travel companies from 40 countries had signed the code.

That the world is rising to the challenge of combating CST through collaboration was also reflected in the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children’s special session in Brussels last year where 70 leaders representing law enforcement, governmental and non-governmental organizations from 16 countries and major international bodies had participated. The broader point of discussion was to create a larger platform to curb the CST and a detailed action plan is expected to be formalised soon.

Some countries are also credited with a pro-active response to the issue as they have put in place stringent legal provisions over the years. According to a study, at least 38 countries have extraterritorial laws today that allow their citizens to be prosecuted specifically for child sexual abuse crimes committed whilst travelling abroad. Australia, Canada, and the UK are the leading examples in this category. US has special laws called the Protect Act (initiated in April 2003) which calls any illicit sexual conduct by its citizen with a person under the age of 18 in a foreign land as federal crime. The punishment doled out in such cases could be as harsh as imprisonment for 15-30 years.
"We have failed to make any headway"
Rakesh Mathur, Hon President (North India), Save the Children India

The issue of child sex exploitation in tourism quarters is not new. But the disquieting fact is despite having laws and policies, nothing concrete has ever been done to combat it.

It would be wrong to say that the issue has been completely overlooked by the stakeholders. In the last decade, an attempt was made by some of us to give a structural shape to the possible battle against the menace. Way back in 2004, an initiative under the stewardship of Late Vipula Kadri, the founder of Save the Children India, was set afoot. To kick off a productive debate on the dimensions of child sex tourism in the country, we had organised a seminar in Goa. We had deliberately chosen this destination because at that point in time it was widely believed that most of the problems associated with child sex tourism in India were rooted in Goa. The conference was well-attended by the travel fraternity, there was a wider consensus that the issue needs a pro-active response and it was here that the first time the concept called “Safe and Honourable Tourism Code” was coined. The intention was to give a progressive connotation to a proposed battle against something extremely grim. The message we wanted to send across was: there will be a constructive move henceforth involving Indian tourism stakeholders to weed out child sexual exploitation.

Later PATA India chapter got aggressively involved in this drive preparing a proposed draft of “Safe and Honourable Tourism Code” which was sent to the Tourism Ministry. We had also got ample support from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in this exercise. They had, in fact, even invited me to address one of their conventions on child exploitation in Geneva.

The code proposed by us ultimately became the bedrock of the guideline which was unveiled by the Tourism Ministry in 2010. The service providers in the tourism ministry were supposed to take an oath and implement its provisions. The intention was indeed honourable as the code unambiguously underlined the do’s and don’ts of all stakeholders. It even provisioned for minute deterrents like hotels putting up signboards at the entrance of the premises pointing out their intolerance to any kind of child sexual harassment by a guest.

But today quite disappointing to see that those honourable intentions which the code signified have continued to remain just that. On the execution parameter which was undoubtedly an onerous task, we have not made much headway and shocking incidents continue to emerge from some quarter or the other. The implementation of the code was something which needed consistent and sincere efforts, most importantly an uttermost serious approach. But it is not visible at all. To make it an ongoing drive, we had even recommended specific allocation of some funds for state tourism departments which they should be spending in monitoring and training on a regular basis. The idea was: with funds in hand, there would be some consistent action on the ground. But nothing has really happened. For me personally, it has been quite frustrating and I do not really know if we will manage to put up a credible fight to child sexual abuse in tourism business in the future.

The safety of persons, in particular women and children. The code was expected to be embraced by all the owners, suppliers, contractors, employees of the travel and tour sector including hotels, restaurants, lodges, guest houses, tour agents, entertainment establishments, transport operators like taxis, buses, tour guides and other services or agencies associated with the tourism sector. The code had also provisioned for an adequate monitoring mechanism as well as training of the personnel in the tourism industry. While presenting the code, the Ministry of Tourism had itself referred to a study by the Ministry of Women and Child Development that there are 3 million commercial sex workers in the country, out of which an estimated 40 percent are children. However, it was not a legally binding instrument but rather a set of guidelines for the tourism industry. Needless to say, it has not been as diligently pursued as it was desired. “I don’t think in a place like Ujjain, more than 10 hotels would have registered themselves to follow this code,” Jain maintains. “The intention behind this code was indeed honourable. But keeping it voluntary was a mistake. When it comes to tourism, the government is more inclined to promote self-regulation. But I don’t think this attitude will work when the target is to tackle an issue like child sex tourism which is benefiting those who are involved,” Aditi points out. Destination like Goa has responded by putting in place its own set of laws to promote responsible tourism but the results have not been up to the mark. “The Goa Children’s Act (GCA) a special State Law provides for the Tourism Department and the Tourism Industry to adopt a Child Friendly Tourism Code. There is a need to understand that by not taking action to stop sex tourism and to protect women and children there are many sensitive tourists who are distressed by what they see and who do not want to come back again as it upsets them,” Nishtha rue.

The most point now is: can we expect to see something significant emerging on this growing threat wherein stakeholders not only acknowledge the problem but also collaborate for an effective solution? The question becomes more pertinent in the backdrop of the fact that now the country is keen to receive more guests with the liberalised visa norms. And while a passport can tell you the name and the nationality, what it can’t exactly tell you are the intentions of a visitor. More importantly, what about the perpetrators within and what alternative can be offered to the willing exploited and their families to keep their heads above the water? Answers aren’t easy. But then, it isn’t easy either to be children of a lesser God in any society, in any system and in any time zone.

By RITWIK SINHA
Tourism must coexist and grow in Harmony with Nature

Environmental concerns and the issue of developing niche tourism products like coastal, wildlife, adventure, etc. always seem to be at loggerheads. Ashok Lavasa, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change tells TourismFirst the developments within the government quarters to bring the priorities of both sides in alignment.

Starting with wildlife, we have introduced new measures in terms of restriction numbers, carrying capacity etc. While we are all concerned about the environment and don’t want to disturb the natural habitat, how can places like Ranthambore or Kaha be a gold mine for Indian tourism? So how can we have a new policy from an environment point of view which unleashes the potential of our wildlife?

I think the basic thing which has to be understood is that the asset which we want to utilize for promoting tourism, that asset has to be saved. So we have to do nothing that disturbs that asset, deteriorates its quality or causes harm in any way. Once we are agreeable on this, then we see how can this be achieved in the best possible way. For example, say wildlife sanctuaries. Yes, even the ministry of environment and forest would

We would like the Tourism Ministry to come up with whatever proposals that they have and where they feel that the Ministry of Environment and Forest needs to review their existing procedures or norms. We are open to this. We have made it known that Ministry of Environment and Climate Change is pro development.
like to promote people visiting them and getting exposed to wildlife and inculcating the love for nature and the spirit to protect wildlife. So apart from the thrill, it is important that we understand these as very essential parts of nature. We are all for this. But the wildlife itself, they have certain instincts or habits and it is important not to do anything which disturbs that. So for example, the number of visitors that can visit the sanctuary, is a part of that. How many people can actually be in the sanctuary at the same time without causing disturbance to these animals?

Would you say as far as carrying capacity is concerned that is a limit that you have already fixed, will there be a review or can there be a review.

It's an ongoing process and there are sanctuaries that keep expanding and there are sanctuaries where you can actually increase the capacity but by reducing the duration of each visitation. If I were to say that I allow a visitor to spend 6 hrs in the sanctuary, then that will obviously limit the capacity.

When you go to South Africa, or even when you go to neighbouring Nepal, they have done wonders and nothing has been disturbed. Some of the finest resorts are around wildlife sanctuaries. These have small airports next to them, and they are tourist attractions where hundred flock through the year.

We are not against providing means of access to these sanctuaries. In fact, we would be happy if more and more people came to visit these sanctuaries.

Is there any discussion with the Tourism Ministry or are you two engaged on this front in terms of forest cover and Indian tourism potential.

We would like the Tourism Ministry to come up with whatever proposals that they have and where they feel that the Ministry of Environment and Forest needs to review their existing procedures or norms. We are open to this. We have made it known that Ministry of Environment and Climate change is pro development.

Coming to India's coastline, we have huge restrictions in place. Here again, the potential of our tourism is being held back?

As far as the coastal zones are concerned, we have had regulations in the past now for 25yrs. There have been some revisions. Now we have got the report of the Shailshesh Nayak committee that was appointed over a year ago to comprehensively look at all the coastal regulations – not only from the point of view of saving the coast but also looking at the problems that people have put forward and looking at the proposals that have come regarding developing the coast from the point of view of saving them. There is an impression and perhaps rightly that the coastal zone regulations actually restricted the growth. So even if you wanted to do something that would improve life in the coastal areas you could not do it. It is from this point of view that the Shailshesh Nayak committee was appointed. They have gone around and discussed with states and various stakeholders. They have now submitted their report to the ministry and we are in the process of examining that report. Once this is done we would also like to consult with other states and ministries that are connected. And then we will take a view on what are the changes that are required.

Do you see some path breaking new initiatives coming to develop the coastal tourism? You are a tourism person also..............Its amazing how everything is on the river in many overseas destinations – in our country, along the coast we see poverty and ruins, and very little development?

These are things we want to correct. We will address many of these things. It is a pity sometimes when you see the Indian coast, how some of the most beautiful beaches have been spoiled and there is scant regard to what is being thrown on the beaches or being discarded into the sea. These are matters of concern for us. And if you want to attract tourists to these beaches you have to give them world class standards.

So what is the plan in that direction?

What we are doing is firstly looking at the Shailshesh Nayak report. We have also put together some of the best practices in countries where beach tourism has been developed. And we are trying to see what are the features which they have incorporated in their policy that we could also use.

Similarly is there any rethinking or any policy being created for wildlife tourism?

Wildlife tourism specifically, we are not considering at this moment. But the Wildlife Protection Act is undergoing an amendment. So if there are features within the act that come in the way of promoting wildlife tourism we can deal with them. But if there are some policy decisions that are required we would await suggestions. There are some good examples that are already existing in our country. Look at the case of Karnataka, where the forest department has a joint venture with the tourism dept and they have promoted their sanctuaries. It has worked well. So it is also up to many state governments to evolve such models where both tourism and forest and wildlife conservation goes hand in hand.

Coming back to beach tourism, you have this new programme called Sagar Mala?

That is being developed with the Shipping Ministry.

By when do you think some new light will happen on the environment policy?

Coastal zone regulation we are in an advanced stage of examining the report. So very soon we should be able to come up with what we intend to do. And then, of course, people will have opportunities to give their inputs.

Any specific thing you have in mind to unleash tourism potential?

See the Shailshesh Nayak committee is not from the point of view of promoting any specific activity. It is generally to regulate and rationalize the development in the coastal zone. Whether it is in terms of residential activities or eco-tourism. But certainly since the coastal area is so important to tourism in our country, they have given some thought to tourism development as well.

by NAVIN BERRY

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