

When it comes to product development, private sector must do its bit and pursue the objective of giving a whole new range of experience. Product development should not be seen as government's job. AMITABH KANT

Tourism can be the biggest growth driver
Amitabh Kant, Secretary, DIPP

Before talking about tourism, let me emphasise on how the national economy is placed today and its key challenges. Tourism or any other sector for that matter will be driven by the national economic trends.

The critical challenge for us in macro-economic terms is to maintain a sustained growth trajectory of 9-10 percent for next three decades to create millions of jobs. If India grows at that robust pace, then everything else will happen including the desired transformation of the tourism sector which after all is a sub-set of the economy. The solutions are clear in terms of how to sustain high growth rate pattern. The country has to become easy and simple place to do business by scrapping plethora of existing procedures. We have to accept the fact that we exist in a globalised world and we have to integrate ourselves with the new emerging trading blocks. And this simply entails opening our economy more. This government during its short stint so far has made a serious attempt to further liberalise its economy by paving the way for FDI limit enhancement in sectors like defence, railways, construction, etc. And the immediate results have been too encouraging – the FDI inflow in recent months have grown by 48 percent. This is credible since there are perceptible declining trends in the global FDI.

There are plenty of positive trappings which strongly underline that India has the mettle to emerge as an economic powerhouse. We have become the third biggest country in terms of start-ups driven by the youthful entrepreneurial energy. The country has also emerged a major Research & Development (R&D) global hub. About 10,000 MNCs have relocated their R&D units in India and in the process they have created half a million jobs. India's growth story so far has been on the basis of rapid strides made by the services sector. We now need to engineer a paradigm shift here – manufacturing has to become an equally strong point for us. In China, the global manufacturing powerhouse, the average wage is increasing by 13 percent annually and this provides us

the chance to make a significant headway in this segment. In terms of evolving as a manufacturing dynamo in the world, it is simply make or mar situation for us and next five-six years will be crucial.

Now coming specifically to the issue of giving a serious push to Indian tourism, I think some important steps have already been taken. But there are other areas where we need to change the policy direction and also the approach of the stakeholders. The opening up of visa regime is a welcome move since we are a long-haul destination which makes visa facilitation a very critical factor. On the aviation front, we need to open our skies more infusing new vigour and dynamism. We must allow more carriers to fly in and out of India. In a globalised world, there is no such thing as a national carrier.

I do not subscribe to the theory of focusing on too many things simultaneously. We must focus on 6-7 circuits, five outstanding destinations first which can demonstrate our capability to expand our portfolio. We also need to take a fresh stance when it comes to opt for the vibrant marketing tools. We exist in a highly digitised and sophisticated world today and our major marketing efforts should be rooted in this medium.

When it comes to product development, private sector must do its bit and pursue the objective of giving a whole new range of experience to the travellers. Product development should not be seen as government's job. New dimensions should be added to the 'Incredible India' campaign and the private sector must pitch in here too. Equally important would be to create a vibrant skill upgradation and training eco-system for the tourism sector.

The global tourism scenario is changing rapidly. 90 percent of Americans have travelled abroad but as against that only 5 percent of Chinese, Koreans and Indians have undertaken overseas trips. And they will be driving the world tourism market going ahead.

Given the unfolding scenario and opportunities, I have no doubt in my mind that tourism in the country can be the biggest driver of growth and biggest employment generator. It simply has all the attributes to successfully integrate with 'Make in India' programme. **TF**

