

TAFI President's article in IMC Journal - "Tourism as a force for Global Peace"



**TAFI PRESIDENT
AJAY PRAKASH**

In an article for the IMC Journal on **"TOURISM as a Force for Global Peace"**, President had stated that the Tourism is a large industry, but it is also a complex one since, unlike most other industries, there is not one clear product. It incorporates many aspects, including accommodation, transport, attractions, travel companies, and more. It comprises a broad group of businesses focused on the satisfaction of customers and providing specific experiences for them. It is unique because it's an industry that is based completely on connecting people across all boundaries of race, religion or nationality and bringing joy to their lives. Further he had stated that "India has assumed the Chair of the prestigious G20, and this is the perfect opportunity to emphatically present before the world all that India has to offer". Tourism offers great opportunities for emerging economies and developing countries. It creates jobs, strengthens the local economy, and contributes to infrastructure development; it can help to conserve the natural environment, cultural assets, and traditions, to reduce poverty and inequality and to heal the wounds of conflict. It is an industry that has a cascading and multiplier effect on many other industries, thereby providing a major boost to the economy. Tourism is about connecting people with each other and with the Planet. We all share the same ideals, hopes and aspirations and travel teach us that diversity is no need for antagonism. He quoted **Mark Twain** - **"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.** Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." It's obvious to everyone that Peace is a prerequisite for the success of tourism, but the converse is equally true, and Tourism can also be a powerful force to foster Peace. **Peace must be marked by a presence, not an absence** – it is not simply the absence of war or conflict; it is the presence of **tolerance, of acceptance of love and understanding.** The **Dalai Lama** once said "Peace does not mean an absence of conflicts; differences will always be there. **Peace means solving these differences through peaceful means;** through dialogue, education, knowledge and through humane ways." In 1986, a visionary man called **Louis D'Amore** established the **International Institute for Peace through Tourism or IIPT.** It was established with a vision that tourism, one of the largest industries, could become the first global Peace industry and the firm belief that every traveler is potentially an Ambassador of Peace. IIPT has only one purpose – to spread greater awareness of the power of Tourism as a vehicle for Peace. The aim of "Peace through Tourism" is to eliminate, or at least reduce, the conditions which lead us to a perception that violence is necessary. The first step is to understand that we can make a difference, that we matter! Like other industries, we too need to lobby the government to make an impact at the policy level. The effects of climate change are all around us. What we term natural disasters are often the result of unchecked human activity – glaciers melting, sea levels rising, unseasonal floods and uncontrollable fires, toxic air, and contaminated water. The magic mantra is "Refuse, Reduce, Recycle." Let us today resolve to work for a more responsible, peace sensitive tourism. In conclusion, he presents the **IIPT Credo of the Peaceful Traveler** as a first step on the path to use tourism to foster a Culture of Peace. **Grateful for the opportunity to travel and experience the world and because peace begins with the individual, I affirm my personal responsibility and commitment to:**

- Journey with an open mind and gentle heart
- Accept with grace and gratitude the diversity I encounter
- Revere and protect the natural environment which sustains all life
- Appreciate all cultures I discover
- Respect and thank my hosts for their welcome
- Offer my hand in friendship to everyone I meet
- Support travel services that share these views and act upon them and,
- By my spirit, words and actions, encourage others to travel the world in peace.

***TAFI National Team Met Newly appointed Turkey Consulate General**



Mr Cüneyt YAVUZCAN, newly appointed **Consul General, Consulate of Türkiye**, Mumbai- invited TAFI President, Mr Ajay Prakash and his team to his office on 9th Jan 2023 at 1130 am. We had a very fruitful discussion on ways and means to promote Tourism to Türkiye. The Consul General reiterated that he and his office would support genuine Travel Agencies who are promoting Tourism in all verticals to Türkiye. A very pleasant meeting, which will hopefully go a long way to further strengthen ties between TAFI and Türkiye.

***TAFI TN Chapter office Bearers Met Newly appointed Tamil Nādu State Tourism Minister**



On Invitation from the office of the Tamil Nadu State Tourism Minister, TN Chapter Office Bearer met Honorable **Minister for Tourism Mr. K. Ramachandran** at his office on 28 Dec 2022. His office had invited the stake holder of the tourism industry and met individually each and everyone. Chairman **Arul Lazaran**, Secretary **Gokularamanan** and Treasurer **Kannappan Babu** met the Honorable Minister and had the opportunity to felicitate him with a shawl. He received us with enthusiasm and discussed with us on improving state tourism. The Office bearers had given their opinion and the minister had taken the points, deliberated with promising note.

***Karnataka Chapter held their members' meeting on 23rd Jan 2023 at Mastiff Hotel.**

TAFI Karnataka chapter had their bimonthly member's meeting on **23rd Jan 23** at **Mastiff Hotel**, Infantry Road. Bengaluru. The meeting was followed by a presentation from **Sri Lankan airlines** and **Sri Lanka tourism. Asego Insurance** who was the sponsor for the meeting also did their product presentation. Members deliberated on various subject in the current scenario. After the presentation by Srilankan Tourism, Srilankan Airlines and Asego, Dinner was served. Some pictures taken During the Meeting.



***‘World’s longest river cruise’ could threaten endangered Ganges dolphin, experts warn**



The Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, has officially launched the “world’s longest river cruise” from the city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The luxury voyage will last 51 days, travelling 3,200km via Dhaka in Bangladesh to Dibrugarh in Assam, crossing 27 river systems. The three-deck MV Ganga Vilas, with 18 suites, is the latest venture in a trend for cruise tourism in India being promoted by the government. Modi hailed the cruise industry on the Ganges as a “landmark moment”, which will herald a new age of tourism

in India. However, environmentalists and conservationists say the rise in cruises could do lasting damage to the habitat of the Ganges River dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*). The MV Ganga Vilas will pass through Kaithi village, 30km from Varanasi at the confluence of the Ganges and Gomti River, where the deep water and slower currents around the intersection provide a safe habitat for the endangered dolphin. In October, wildlife officials spotted a pod with calves, and put the number of dolphins in the area at 35 to 39. It is one of several protected cetacean habitats on the route of the cruise, including Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary in Bihar. *Platanista gangetica* is one of the two freshwater dolphin species in south Asia, alongside *Platanista minor* or the Indus River dolphin, found in Pakistan and the Beas River in north India. “The cruises are a dangerous proposition in addition to all the existing risks for the dolphins,” said Ravindra Kumar Sinha, whose conservation efforts led the government to designate Gangetic dolphins as a protected species in the 1990s. Their numbers have risen in recent years, with about 3,200 in the Ganges and 500 in the Brahmaputra, due to improved water conditions and conservation initiatives. But Sinha fears cruise tourism will undo these gains. “There’s no doubt that disturbances from cruises will gravely impact the dolphins, which are sensitive to noise,” he said. Kashif Siddiqui, marketing director of Antara cruises, said the MV Ganga Vilas cruise was so popular that trips were sold out for the next two years. “We are following all the environmental precautions and government guidelines,” he said. Promotional material for the cruise, says: “With sustainable principles at its heart, the Ganga Vilas incorporates pollution prevention and noise control technologies to honor the ancient rivers travelled through.” At present, about 100 cruise trips operate on the NW-1 Ganges and NW-2 Brahmaputra routes, with the government looking to increase the number 10-fold. Development on this scale, environmentalists say, would have huge adverse effects on the riverine ecosystem.

***Vistara partners WorldTicket to enable connections on Germany's Deutsche Bahn train**



Full-service carrier Vistara has entered into a partnership with WorldTicket that will enable providing connections to customers on Germany's Deutsche Bahn train network. The interline partnership with WorldTicket (W2), part of the 777 Travel Tech group, and the only authorized distributor for Europe's largest railway operator, Deutsche Bahn, will enable the carrier to offer multimodal itineraries to its customers. According to a release, customers will be able to seamlessly book air and rail travel throughout Germany and other European cities on a single itinerary. "Vistara customers can now easily connect from any one of 16,000 train stations in Germany to Frankfurt Airport and fly Vistara to Delhi, and vice

versa. In addition to train stations across Germany, Vistara customers can also travel to and from Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Brussels (Belgium), and Zurich or Basel (Switzerland) on Deutsche Bahn's extensive network," it said. The flight segment of the customer's journey is being operated and marketed under Vistara's 'UK' while the train segment is operated by Deutsche Bahn and marketed by 'W2'. "From the customer's perspective, they will book a single itinerary that includes both flight and rail reservations and only need to check in separately for each segment. Once passengers arrive at Frankfurt (FRA), they can clear immigration, collect their bags and proceed to the railway station at Frankfurt Airport to board their train," the release said. Vistara -- a joint venture between Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines -- has a fleet of 52 aircraft.

***Saudia's new service to offer 96-hour tourist visa upon ticket purchase**



Saudi Arabia's Airlines Saudia will offer the service of issuing a tourist visa for free when purchasing a ticket, Abdullah al-Shahrani, the airlines spokesperson told. The service will be launched "in the next few days," Al-Shahrani explained, adding that the visa will only be issued to those who wish to visit the Kingdom for tourism purposes and to perform Umrah. He added that that the visa is valid for a maximum of four days. The new decision has been coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Hajj and Umrah and the "Guests of God" service program, Al-Shahrani added.

***Costs of UAE visas, Emirates ID increase as new fee is applied**



The fees to issue Emirates ID and visas in the UAE have gone up, travel and typing center agents have told Khaleej Times. Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Ports Security (ICP) confirmed that its fees have gone up by Dh100/-. A typing center agent said the fee increase applies to Emirates ID and visit and residency visas. Emirates ID will now issue a one-month visit visa is Dh370 instead of Dh270. Travel agents said there are no changes yet to visit visas issued from Dubai. "We applied for a few visit visas in Dubai today and have not seen any changes yet,"

said Bharath Aidasani, managing partner of Pluto Travels. Robin Pathrose, operations head at Kingsland Travel and Tourism LLC, confirmed the changes in the ICA e-c since yesterday. The Dh100 additional fee applies to 30- and 60-day tourist visas, Emirates IDs, and all other Deepak Kaushik, marketing director, Rooh Tourism, said: "The agent fees for a 60-day tourist visa will depend on the travel aggregators. They have set of service fees for different types of visas and services." He was referring to the additional charges by agents, which will be added to the overall government service fee. This is the latest in a string of changes to the visa and residency system implemented recently. Visit visas can now with holders having to exit the country and come back on a fresh visa. The ICP also recently standardized the fine on overstaying to Dh50. Tourist and visit visa holders who overstay will pay Dh 50 a day instead of Dh 100. Those overstaying on residency Visa will have to pay double — Dh50 a day instead of Dh25. Last year, the UAE's largest entry and residency reforms went into effect. The changes included a significantly expanded Golden Visa Scheme, a new five-year Green Residency, a multiple-entry tourist visa and job-hunting entry permits.

***Enjoy your long wait at Chennai airport, a multiplex to be opened**



If you reach Chennai airport early or have enough time to reach your destination after landing or if you are a transit passenger, you have now a great option. A multiplex theatre will be opened in Chennai airport soon. The facility by PVR is ready for commercial opening and is awaiting final licenses from the authorities, which will hopefully be getting after the Pongal holidays. The theatre will be a five-screen facility and can accommodate 1000 passengers once opened. The theatre is coming up

on the top floor of the multi-level car parking space at the airport, which was opened to the public recently. Flyers from the airport can reach the theatre through a link bridge. Construction of this bridge has also been completed. The multi-level car parking facility with food courts and retail shops was made operational in December last year. A shopping mall in the complex is also nearing completion. Last month, the Chennai airport recorded the highest daily footfall. On December 23, as many as 60,375 passengers were handled at the airport which was the highest of the year 2022. According to airport sources, even in the pre-covid years - 2018 and 2019 -, the passenger footfall did not touch 60,000 and it was only around 40,000 per day. In November last year, the passenger footfall at the Chennai airport was 15,85,199 lakh and in December it was 17,22,496 lakhs. Chennai International Airport is the fourth busiest airport in India and the third busiest airport for international traffic in the country. Though the airport authorities earlier planned a satellite terminal in Chennai, it was put on hold temporarily as the air traffic has not seen satisfactory growth, especially after covid. The Chennai airport located at Tirusulam, which is around 20 kilometers away from the city center, is expected to reach saturation by 2035, with a peak capacity of 40 million passengers.

***US Visa: After Google Layoffs 2023, IT giant pauses key process for H-1B Visa holders:**



Google Layoffs 2023 has left around 12,000 employees without jobs. These mass layoffs at Google have brought in more bad news for employees, especially those who are in the US on a H-1B Visa. After the layoffs, the IT Giant has paused PERM - a key step towards getting a green card. Google's PERM - Programme Electronic Review Management - which helps in foreign employees to acquiring a green card in the US, has been paused. "Recognizing how this news may impact some of you and your families, I wanted to update you as quickly as possible on the difficult decision we've had to make to pause new PERM applications. This does not impact other visa applications or programmes," read the email issued to employees. This email was posted by employees on Team Blind, which is an anonymous social networking site for IT workers. For H-1B Visa Holders in the US, to get a green card, one's employer must verify the candidate. If a H-1B Visa holder is laid off, they have 60 days to find a new job and stay in the country legally. As laid off employees' race against time, this decision by Google has put them in a limbo. Many IT Employees have already been struggling to find a job and have resorted to WhatsApp groups for any communication for job leads and more. In the green card process, the PERM application is considered of utmost importance. Under this process, employers must demonstrate that there are no qualified US workers available for the role and hence, foreign employees were asked to join. Google clarified that applications with have already been submitted under PERM will be process and supported. However, no new applications will be allowed.

***U.S. missions in India to raise staff strength to speed up visa processing**



Promising to bring its visa staff across the U.S. embassy and five consulates in India back up to full strength in the next few months, the U.S. on Sunday said it was launching a "surge" in staffing and several other measures to increase visa processing capacity across the country. The statement came even as U.S. missions in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, and Hyderabad clock up processing times of up to two years for a normal visitor visa for tourism or business (B1/B2). The embassy also said

Saturday (January 21) was the first of several Saturdays when visa offices would remain open across India. "Our consular teams across India are putting in the extra hours to meet the needs of international travelers and bring down wait times," said Mumbai Consular Chief John Ballard. "This is part of a mission-wide effort to find innovative solutions to facilitate travel to the United States," he added. According to the U.S. embassy, the India mission released more than 2,50,000 additional B1/B2 appointments in 2022 and adjudicated more than 8,00,000 non-immigrant visas during the year. Despite all the measures, the U.S. State department estimates that the wait time for a visitor's visa interview in Delhi and the five Indian consulates is between 500-600 days, in contrast to European capitals where it is about 20 days, or Beijing where it is 34 days.

***Vistara turns a 'profit' for the first time since inception:**



Vistara, a joint venture of Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines, has reported a net profit (excluding unrealized foreign currency loss and non-operating income) for the quarter ending December 2022, the airline said in a statement on January 23. Vistara carried 33.06 lakh passengers in the October-December quarter garnering a market share of 9.2 percent, according to data by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. The full-service carrier crossed the \$1

billion revenue mark and remained EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization) positive in the current fiscal year. The airline also reported break even for the first time in the given quarter, it said. In Q3FY23, the airline grew its capacity by 37 percent and passengers by 47 percent compared to the same period last year.

***Indian Government Engages In Talks To Create Hub Airports**



While Indian aviation has made tremendous strides in the last two decades, it hasn't been able to create a global aviation hub model. With air passengers and fleet slated to increase significantly over the next five to ten years, India's aviation minister feels the time is right to create an international aviation hub in the country. For this, the government is already engaging in talks with key stakeholders. India's aviation ministry is keen to replicate the model of global aviation hubs such as Dubai (DXB) and Singapore (SIN) and is in talks with airports and airlines to take the plan further. At a civil aviation conference organized by the industry body ASSOCHAM, India's Civil Aviation Minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia, commented, "We are in talks with two to three airlines and an airport for the creation of an international hub in India. And for the creation of that hub, you got to take the volatility out of the arrival and departure plans and smoothen out that curve so that you can provide the incoming flights time to allow international departures." He added that India's aviation growth, particularly in the last few years, warrants a culture of hub airports. Scindia had earlier stressed that there were 200 million domestic and international air passengers in India before COVID-19 and that this number would reach 400 million over the next seven to 10 years. The country is also projected to have a total of 220 airports, including heliports and aerodromes, by 2026. India's geographic location could also be an advantage, positioned conveniently between important global destinations. But there's plenty of groundwork to be done before a hub airport can be created in the country. From requiring more widebody planes (something that Air India is working on) to developing adequate airport infrastructure, many gaps need to be plugged. While India has seen the development of many airports over the last few years, there have been several reports of many of them being understaffed. Air Traffic Control is one such department that needs more employees urgently. Hopefully, with correct planning and efficient execution, India could see an international hub on its soil in the years to come.

***IndiGo's One-Stop Service from Thiruvananthapuram To Kolkata Saves Time:**



IndiGo's ability to identify market demand is second to none. Its extensive network provides convenient connections, and sometimes its flights are the only ones between certain destinations. The airline now also connects the South Indian city of Thiruvananthapuram with Kolkata in East India with a one-stop connection via Chennai, significantly reducing travel time. IndiGo has started flying between Thiruvananthapuram in the South Indian state of Kerala and Kolkata via Chennai. Flight 6E6169 has a scheduled departure time of 13:40 and an arrival of 15:05 in Chennai. There, it has a stopover of 45 minutes before it departs for Kolkata at 15:50. Its final arrival time at Kolkata is 18:00. Before this, anyone traveling between the two cities had to fly for more than seven hours on average, but this has now been reduced to four and a half hours. With demand on this sector seemingly strong, a non-stop flight in the future could not be ruled out as well. IndiGo is the leader in identifying gaps in the market and starting flights to meet demand. Earlier this month, it commenced the first-ever direct flight service between Kolhapur and Bengaluru as it sees high levels of travel demand in the region from leisure and business travelers. The airline anticipates that this new route will help boost the city's travel economy while offering travelers another affordable travel destination.

***Efficiency, costs key focus in Air India-Vistara merger drill**



An internal team of senior executives from **Air India and Vistara**, along with external consultants, are leading an extensive exercise in **merging the two airlines**, said people aware of the development. This includes consultations to rationalize operations, including salary structures, address cultural compatibility, and to identify leaders to drive the brand transformation and transition, the people said. "The top management of both airlines and senior to mid-level executives will be interviewed by external consultants, followed by another round of talks with an expert internal team, with representatives from both airlines. Then the best fit will be retained for the post, and other candidates will be given a different role if available," said one of the people, seeking anonymity. In January 2022, Air India had 12,085 employees, including 8,084 permanent staff, when it was handed over to the Tata Group as part of the government's divestment programme. Vistara has about 5,000 employees. "Air India is also looking at bringing parity in the compensation structures since the non-flying crew of Vistara is paid more than those of

Air India. There will be rounds of salary corrections in the non-flying crew of Air India", he added. While the airline is looking at offering voluntary retirement to a section of employees close to retirement, cabin and flight crew are likely to be retained as Air India aims to increase its fleet size by threefold within five years. "The airline is hiring fresh talent in various departments. In many cases, the roles are not clearly defined for the time being. But the plan is to offer senior employees' voluntary retirement before new hires are trusted with their roles. Even those who are not close to retirement will be judged based on merit. There will be no free lunches," a second official aware of the development said. "While routes will be rationalized, major retrenchments are not expected for pilots as well as cabin crew because Air India has commissioned a new fleet of 777, and not many pilots are familiar with the aircraft. The demand for pilots and flying crew will remain high," he added.

***Saudi Arabia ranks first among Arab nations for inbound visitors in 2022**



Saudi Arabia registered more international arrivals than any other Arab nation during the first nine months of 2022, as government officials target 100 million annual visitors by the end of this decade. Owing to these unprecedented numbers, the Kingdom's burgeoning tourism sector will represent a key focus at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023, which will take place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from 1-4 May. This year's Saudi Summit will take place on the Global Stage and focus on the importance of the Kingdom in reshaping the regional travel

and tourism landscape now that mega projects are well under way. In addition to the summit, ATM 2023 will feature a host of Saudi exhibitors, including Saudi Arabian Airlines (SAUDIA), flynas, Makkah Clock Royal Tower, Asma Hospitality Company, Eye of Riyadh, Itrip, Dur Hospitality, Sadana Real Estate Co, Saudi Amad for Airport Services & Transport Support and many more. Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "The ATM 2023 Saudi Summit will offer an ideal forum in which travel professionals and policymakers from across the Middle East and beyond can explore opportunities and challenges within the Kingdom's ever-growing tourism sector. Figures released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) show that Saudi Arabia attracted more than 18 million inbound visits in the first three quarters of 2022, followed by the United Arab Emirates (14.8 million tourists) and Morocco (11 million tourists), which ranked second and third in the region, respectively. Tourism spending in Saudi Arabia also skyrocketed last year, hitting \$7.2 billion in H1 2022 according to figures released by the country's Ministry of Investment. Travel experts from around the world will place these statistics under the microscope at ATM 2023, as part of a series of KSA-focused sessions and panel discussions.

***Rajabhoj airport to be operational 24x7 from April in Bhopal**



Late-night flights will be operational at Bhopal's Raja Bhoj airport. The Airport Authority of India (AAI) has given in-principle approval to include Bhopal in the list of selected airports in the country from where 24-hour flight operations can take place from April 1. With this decision, airlines will be encouraged to make Bhopal a base station. A proposal had been sent before Covid pandemic, seeking approval for 24-hour flight operations at Raja Bhoj Airport. Since then, the proposal was in a queue for approval.

Bhopal has now joined the club of one lakh monthly passenger club. The passenger load of airlines has reached above 80 percent. On the other hand, the authority is also engaged in mobilizing facilities of international levels. For all these reasons, the facility has finally given in-principle approval. With this facility, night parking arrangements for aircraft are also made at airports with 24-hour flight operations. Officials said after April 1, early movement of flights in the morning will be possible. At present, the flight movement starts around 8 am. However, once the airport opens 24 hours the flights will start much earlier. Similarly, flight movement will also be possible late at night. Officials said that at present the last flight arrives around 9.30 pm At present, Bhopal airport has a base for 17 aircraft including four at the old part of the airport. Sources said that after getting the approval for the 24-hour operations the number of bases will be increased. Incidentally, for the first time, Raja Bhoj airport in the latest survey has secured the second position in the 'Customer Satisfaction Survey' for the period of July-December 2022. In the previous survey (January-June 2022), Bhopal was on the third spot. As per the latest survey, Bhopal secured an overall 4.98 points. In the previous survey, Bhopal had secured 4.96 points.

*BLS International enters contract with Malaysian Immigration Authority for visa.



Online visa servicing company in India, **BLS International**, has tied up with the **Malaysia Immigration Department** to issue e-visas for travel to Malaysia. Starting **January 23**, BLS International (India) will begin its Malaysian e-visa operations in Delhi for providing applicants with rapid and simplified visa services. The contract is valid up to **November 14, 2025**. BLS has more than 2,325 offices in 62 countries. "We believe that this partnership will further strengthen India–Malaysia relationships and encourage more people to visit Malaysia, both as tourists and to do business. This contract will also strengthen economic ties between the two nations," said Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint Managing Director, BLS International. "That said, I look forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship between BLS International and the Malaysia Immigration Department," he added. This contract is particularly significant as tourist and business traffic from India to Malaysia is one of the highest from India to any other country. Apart from ASEAN, India is now the top contributor of foreign arrivals to Malaysia, with 71,481 Indian tourist arrivals between January to June 2022 alone post the pandemic as things are picking up. The same number was 26+ million in 2019 and the number of tourists is likely to cross this number soon. While Delhi has the largest number of people applying for tourist visas to Malaysia, Chennai is where the highest number of applicants for work permit visas are from. Under this contract, BLS International will also provide work and business-visas.

*TAP Portugal cancels 1,300 flights ahead of strike



Portugal's state-owned airline TAP said Thursday that it had cancelled over 1,300 flights ahead of a one-week strike called by unions starting next week to protest pay cuts. A majority of the airline's nearly 1,000 employees voted to press ahead with the stoppage for January 25 to 31 after rejecting management's latest offer. The strike is expected to cost the company around 48 million euros (USD 52 million) and affect some 156,000 passengers, it said in a statement, after a two-day walkout in December that saw 360 flights cancelled. TAP says the salary reductions as well as job cuts and plane sales are needed to get the debt-laden carrier back on solid financial footing after its renationalization in 2020. The European Union conditioned the move on a 3.2-billion-euro restructuring plan, which has been challenged by the TAP pilots' union. Employee anger deepened after it emerged in December that a cabinet member in Prime Minister Antonio Costa's government got a 500,000-euro severance package after stepping down from TAP's board last year. Junior finance minister Alexandra Reis was forced to resign over the scandal, which also prompted infrastructure minister Pedro Nunes Santos and his deputy Hugo Santos Mendes to step down.

*Ministry of Ayush, ITDC sign MoU to promote Medical Value Travel in India



Medical Value Travel has seen significant growth in India in recent years. According to the report 'The Global Wellness Economy: Looking beyond Covid' by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), the Global Wellness economy will grow at 9.9 per cent annually. Ayush based healthcare & Wellness economy is estimated to grow to USD 70 billion by 2025. Keeping that in mind and with an aim to work together for the promotion of Medical Value Travel in Ayurveda and other traditional systems of medicine, **the Ministry of Ayush** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC)**, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Under the agreement, the Ministry of Ayush will provide training to ITDC officials to sensitize them about the Medical Value Travel in Ayurveda and other traditional systems of medicine. It will identify tourist circuits, where there is immense scope to promote medical value travel in Ayurveda and other traditional systems of medicine and provide all the technical knowhow from time to time to ITDC, the official statement said. The MoU was signed by Shashi Ranjan Vidyarthi, Director, Ministry of Ayush and Piyush Tiwari, Director (Commercial and Marketing), ITDC in presence of other senior officials. To further monitor the implementation and progress of this MoU, a Joint Working Group (JWG) will be co-chaired by representatives from **MoA and ITDC**. The group will also identify the best practices adopted by Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to promote themselves as a preferred destination for medical value travel, the Ministry of Ayush said. Additionally, the prospects of medical value travel were also discussed in the recently concluded First Health Working Group meeting of G20 India presidency at Thiruvananthapuram where the Kerala G20 delegates deliberated on opportunities and challenges related to its promotions.

***Thailand approves USD 120 million budget to support domestic tourism**

Thailand's cabinet on Tuesday approved a budget of THB 3.95 billion (USD 120.61 million) to boost domestic travel and draw in foreigners, government spokesperson Anucha Burapachaisri said. Domestic Tourism will be allocated 2 billion baht from February to September, and the remainder will be used to promote secondary cities to international travelers, he said. Thailand saw 11.81 million tourists in 2022, up from just 400,000 the previous year, but the figure was still lower than the record 39.8 million people that visited the Southeast Asian country in 2019. The figures were released by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) on Monday and predicted that 2022's number will double to 25 million this year, reports the BBC. The country is set to start charging overseas visitors 300 baht (USD 9.20) each from the start of June.

***Over 30 passengers miss Scoot's Amritsar-Singapore flight; DGCA seeks report from airline**



As many as 32 passengers missed their Scoot flight after its departure from Amritsar to Singapore was rescheduled on Wednesday and aviation regulator DGCA has sought a report from the airline on the incident, officials said on Thursday. A Scoot spokesperson said that due to inclement weather conditions affecting departures, the flight was rescheduled to depart Amritsar at 3.45 pm instead of the original timing of 7.55 pm on Wednesday, and that where possible,

passengers were notified based on the contact details provided. A senior official at Amritsar airport said there were around 300 passengers for the flight. As per the airline, the change in timing was informed to the passengers and travel agents but apparently, it seems a particular travel agent did not inform the passengers concerned, the official said. "All booking agents were informed well in time, and they relayed the information to their clients. But only one agent could not inform his clients for reasons best known to him," V K Seth, Director of the airport, told. He added that 263 passengers who boarded the flight reported at the airport well in time. Scoot is the low-cost subsidiary of Singapore Airlines. "Due to inclement weather conditions affecting departures, the flight was retimed to depart Amritsar at 3.45 pm, instead of the original departure timing of 7.55 pm. Affected passengers were notified in advance of the departure time change, through email and/or SMS, where possible based on the contact details provided," the spokesperson said in a statement.

***Philippines welcomes back Chinese tourists with music & gifts.**



Filipinos in traditional attire on Tuesday played bamboo marimbas and handed out necklaces and gifts to their first Chinese visitors since before the pandemic, seeking to lure back tourists after China's scrapping of its Covid-19 curbs. Chinese travelers no longer need to quarantine on return home and holiday bookings have surged from what was the world's largest outbound travel market in 2019. "Only 39,627 people from China visited last year, when the Philippines started relaxing its restrictions. The once USD 255 billion annual global spending

by Chinese tourists ground to a virtual halt during the pandemic and left a hole in the Asian market. The Philippines, known for its powdery white sand beaches and lush marine life, is targeting 4.8 million foreign tourists this year, after 2.6 million in 2022. "We anticipate even more Chinese tourists to arrive, which will greatly help us in our effort to transform and recover the tourism industry," Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco told reporters. "Our intention is not only to regain our pre-pandemic numbers but to exceed it."

***UK's New Student Visa Policy: Students May Ask to Leave If Unemployed After 6 Months**

Under the current Graduate Visa route, international students, including Indians, are given two years' time to get work experience up to two years without the requirement of a specific job offer, but according to some media reports the country is now considered to cut this period to six months. According to a report published in The Times, the UK government is looking to "reform" the Graduate Visa route requiring students to obtain a work visa by getting a skilled job or leave the UK after six months. British Home Secretary Suella Braverman has reportedly drawn up a plan to cut the period of stay allowed for overseas students under a post-study visa route. The report cited a government source, who backs Braverman's plan, saying that the Graduate Visa was being increasingly used by students on short courses at "less respectable universities". "It's being used as a backdoor immigration route," the newspaper quoted the source as saying. According to official data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Indian students were the largest beneficiaries among foreign students of the new Graduate Visa route, introduced in July 2021. Indians accounted for 41 per cent of the visas granted under this route in 2021.

*Azerbaijan Tourism to host travel trade roadshows in Chennai & Ahmedabad:



Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) is participating in the two major tourism exhibitions in India to reconnect with tourism partners. Together with **14 industry partners**, including Azerbaijan Airlines, hospitality industry members, tour operators and tourism agencies, Azerbaijan is presenting myriads of travel experiences - from hiking to lush nature and wellness experiences at the best resorts, and from vibrant winter resorts to delicious traditional cuisine and culture. Moreover, ATB will be hosting travel trade **roadshows in Chennai and Ahmedabad**, providing an opportunity for B2B meetings and networking among industry professionals. "We are very excited to return to India, reconnect with our industry partners and share tourism news from Azerbaijan. Last year, direct flights between Baku and Mumbai and Baku and New Delhi were launched, which made the country more accessible and convenient for Indian travelers. More than 60,000 tourists from India visited Azerbaijan in 2022, and we are confident that this number will increase this year. We are looking forward to building more connections with Indian partners and creating the best travel experiences for tourists in Azerbaijan," said **Bahruz Asgarov**, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Azerbaijan Tourism Board. There are lots of cultural and historical points of familiarity between the two nations. The versatile culture of Azerbaijan has evolved with the passing through of travelers along the Great Silk Road. The fire-worshipping Zoroastrians left their mark at **Ateshgah**, where the Fire Temple continues to amaze visitors with its spouts of flames and inscriptions in **Sanskrit** adorned by 19th-century Hindu merchants. For true nature lovers, the country offers newly established hiking trails with picturesque views to the Greater Caucasus and Lesser Caucasus Mountains. Now, citizens of more than 100 countries can travel to Azerbaijan. To enter the country, Indian citizens need to apply for an e-VISA through **evisa.gov.az** at least **three days** before their planned arrival date to Azerbaijan.

*United Airlines CEO warns travelers more disruptions ahead



The CEO of United Airlines said Wednesday that other airlines won't be able to handle all the flights they plan to operate this year, leading to more disruptions for travelers. Scott Kirby said airlines that operate as if this is still 2019, before the pandemic, are bound to struggle. He said the industry is dealing with a shortage of pilots and other workers, outdated technology, and strain on the Federal Aviation Administration, which manages the nation's airspace. "The system simply can't handle the volume today, much less the anticipated growth," Kirby said. "There are a number of airlines who cannot fly their schedules. The customers are paying the price." As an example of what can go wrong, Kirby referred to massive cancellations in late December. Southwest Airlines - which Kirby did not mention by name - scrubbed nearly 17,000 flights in late December after a winter storm upset the schedule and overwhelmed the airline's crew-scheduling system. "What happened over the holidays wasn't a one-time event caused by the weather, and it wasn't just at one airline," he said. Alaska, Spirit and Frontier also had double-digit percentages of cancelled flights in late December. United's rate of cancelled flights last year was slightly better than most rivals but not the best. Among the six largest U.S. airlines, Delta cancelled 1.4 per cent of its scheduled flights in 2022 while United dropped 2.0 per cent, Alaska 2.4 per cent, American 2.5 per cent, Southwest 3.0 per cent and JetBlue 3.1 per cent, according to tracking service FlightAware.

*Airlines to pay 75 percent of cost if passengers downgraded involuntarily - DCGA:



Aviation regulator **DGCA** (Directorate General of Civil Aviation) has amended its **Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR)** rules for passengers who are unable to board due to denied boarding, cancellation of flights, and delays in flights. The amendment of CAR will now allow the passengers, who are downgraded involuntarily and are carried in a class lower than that for which the ticket is purchased, to be reimbursed by the airline. For **domestic sector** flights, **75 per cent** of the cost of the ticket including taxes will be reimbursed. For the **international sector**, **30 per cent** of the cost of the ticket including taxes for flights of **1500 km** or less; **50 per cent** of the cost of the ticket including taxes for flights between **1500 km to 3500 km**; **75 per cent** of the cost of the ticket including taxes for flights **more than 3500 km**. The amendment in the CAR, the civil aviation regulator in a statement, said, is to strengthen the rights of air travelers affected by the downgrading of their tickets. The new norms will be effective from **February 15**, a senior official at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation on 25 Jan (Wednesday). The regulator decided to amend the norms against the backdrop of complaints from booked for a particular class being downgraded by airlines. In December last year, DGCA proposed that airlines should have to **refund the total value** of such ticket including taxes and also that affected passengers will be flown free of cost in the next available class. However, the official said those proposals have been modified in line with international practices. Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) pertaining to facilities to be provided to passengers by airlines due to cancellation of flights, and delays in flights.

Queen of the Skies: Virgin Atlantic names plane after 'unforgettable' Queen Elizabeth:



In honor of Queen Elizabeth II and her 70-year reign in the UK, British airline company Virgin Atlantic has named one of its aircraft on the late monarch. Virgin Atlantic is reusing the phrase "Queen of the Skies" as it names new Airbus A330neo after the late Queen Elizabeth II although the now-discontinued Boeing 747 once carried the designation. Virgin Atlantic has a long tradition of naming its aircraft in honour of remarkable women, including Diana, named after Princess Diana. Lade Emmeline (G-VLIB), a ship of Virgin Atlantic's current fleet, is a tribute to Emmeline Pankhurst, the leader of the taking flying training while pretending to be a boy and serving as a trailblazing hostess on the perilous BSA routes. During her reign, Queen Elizabeth travelled extensively, stopping in more than 120 different countries before she passed away in September 2022. The livery is painted with a picture of a woman with red hair wearing a dress that is the signature red colour of Virgin. "Just like Queen Elizabeth during her historic 70-year reign, Virgin Atlantic is proud to fly the flag for the United Kingdom around the world. We're delighted to soon be welcoming 'Queen of the Skies' to our fleet and hope that it serves as a fitting tribute to an unforgettable, much-loved monarch," Corneel Koster, chief customer and operations officer at Virgin Atlantic, said. The fourth Airbus A330neo to enter Virgin Atlantic's fleet is named Queen of the Skies. Eliza Doolittle (G-VTOM), Billie Holiday (G-VJAZ), and Space Oddity (G-VLDY) are the other three. Virgin Atlantic has placed an order for 12 new Airbus A330neos to join its fleet as part of its commitment to operating the cleanest, greenest fleet in the sky.

*AAI chairman says will implement Digi Yatra at Kolkata, Pune, Vijayawada airports.



Airports Authority of India Chairman Sanjeev Kumar on Thursday said the Union government is implementing Digi Yatra at Kolkata, Pune and Vijayawada airports after the successful implementation at Varanasi airport. During the celebration of 74th Republic Day at Delhi's AAI-ATC (Air Traffic Control) services building, the AAI chairman said, "Digi Yatra is an important step that we have been able to implement after 3-4 years of hard work. The AAI had been effectively involved under the ministry and with

the help of private operators, we have made an ecosystem ready where software is made separately and hardware is kept at the airport so that passengers could have a faceless identification and travel faster." "Whenever passengers come to airport, they go through security check at first, then at check-in and inside another security check at the boarding gate. At these places, implementing a seamlessly, paperless travel without these documents," the chairman said. "We are happy to have been able to implement this at Varanasi airport and many passengers have been able to use it," the chairman said, adding, "More than 25-30 per cent passengers have been using this service at Varanasi airport." He said, "We request passengers who haven't used to use it, to use this hassle-free and paperless travel." Digi Yatra envisages a traveler pass through various checkpoints at the airports through a paperless and contactless processing, using facial features to establish his identity which could be linked to the boarding pass. To use this facility, one-time registration on Digi Yatra app is required using Aadhaar based validation and a self-image capture.

*Char Dham yatra to be conducted 'as per carrying capacity.'



In the wake of parts of Joshimath slipping and sinking, the Uttarakhand government is contemplating a cap on the number of pilgrims to be allowed at each of the four key dhams (shrines) of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri this year. The yatra is expected to commence from April. Besides, authorities are mulling over ways to reduce the burden on Joshimath - the last major halt before Badrinath and the only route as of now to the pilgrimage town - during the yatra season. In 2022, a record turnout of 45 lakh pilgrims was witnessed. Tourism Minister Satpal Maharaj said preparations in this regard are underway. "We can take a final decision after the

announcement of the dates (for the yatra). Right now, we are looking into various aspects which includes setting a limit on the number of pilgrims each day in accordance with the carrying capacity of each dharm. Efforts are also being made to ensure that land subsidence does not have any impact on the yatra."