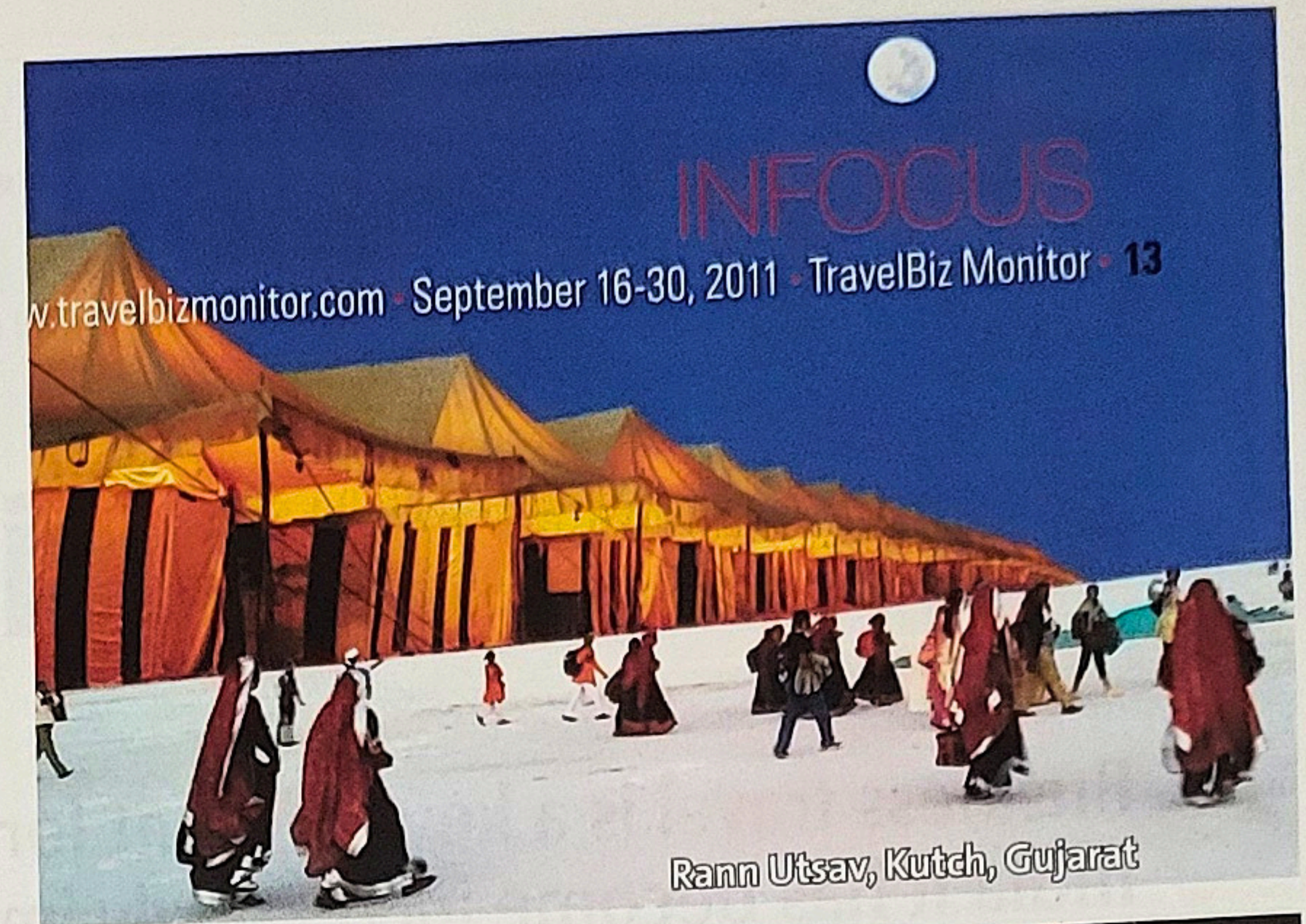




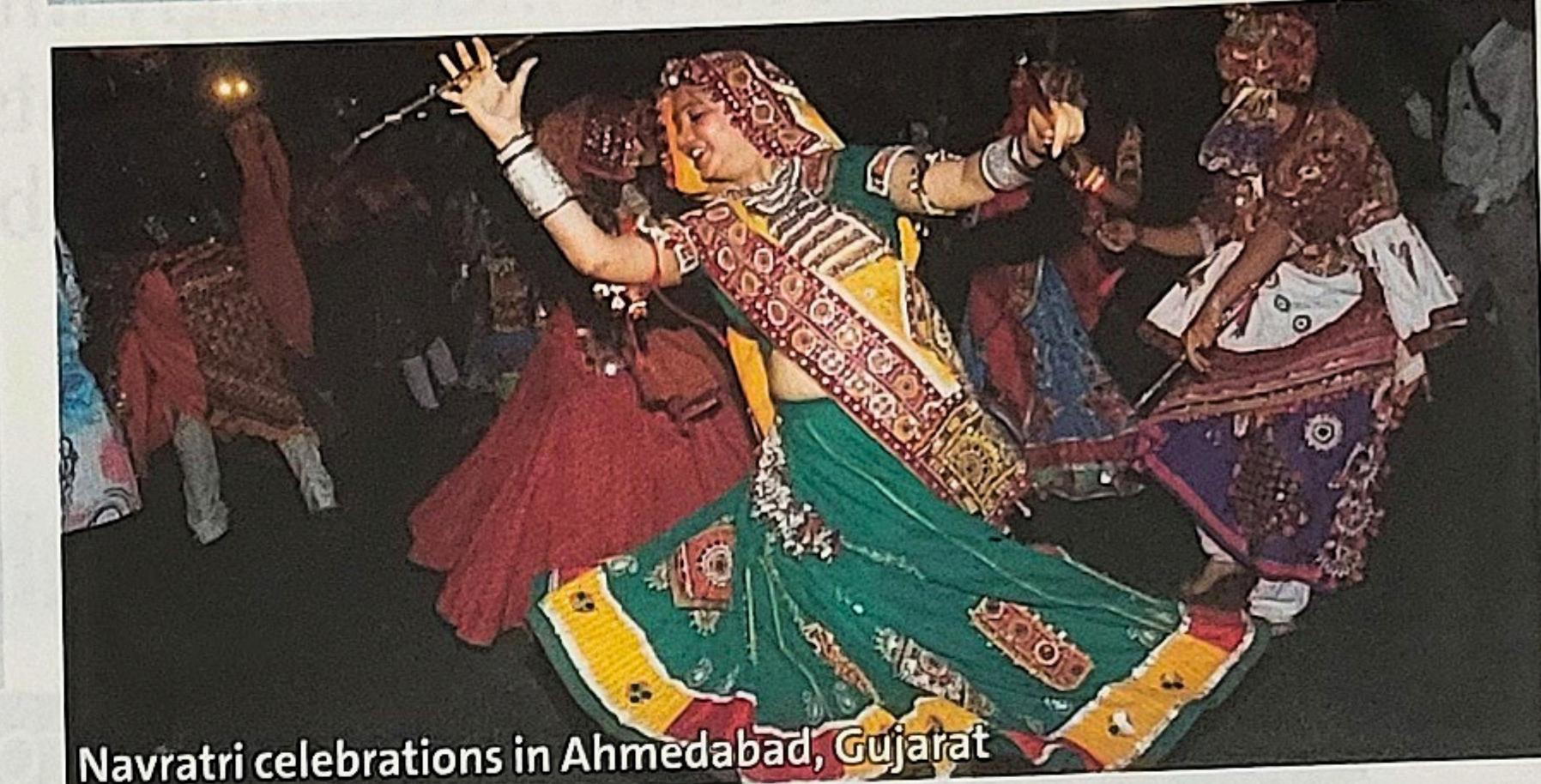
Gir Forest, Gujarat



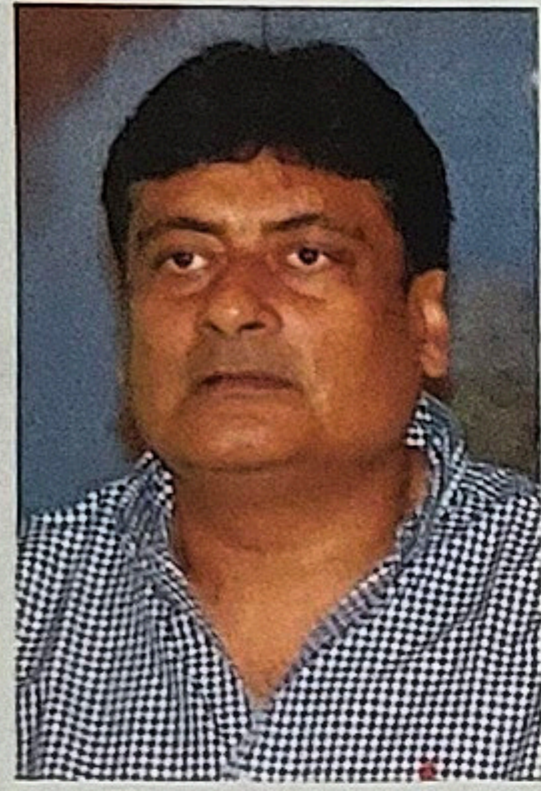
Mandvi Beach, Gujarat



Rann Utsav, Kutch, Gujarat



Navratri celebrations in Ahmedabad, Gujarat



Vipul Mittra

The main agenda of hosting IATO convention in Gujarat is to promote the state as an attractive tourism destination. We will take IATO convention delegates to various destinations like Dwarka, Somnath, Kutch, Mandvi and Gir National Park on FAM trips. We want them to experience tourism linkages including hotels, transport and other facilities maintained at these places directly and promote tourism in Gujarat. Every tour operator wants to experience and sell Gujarat, as it is slowly turning into a tourism hot spot. The government is also taking up various initiatives, including development of new policies for promoting tourism in Gujarat. This is a good time for tour operators to explore Gujarat and promote the state among domestic and foreign tourists.

Vipul Mittra

Principal Secretary, Tourism,
Civil Aviation and Pilgrimage, Govt. of Gujarat



SUBHASH GOYAL
Chairman, STIC Travel Group and
Immediate Past President, IATO

Vice President, IATO, said, "The industry in India is stable in spite of recession in the main source markets. However, we need to move fast if we want to achieve the targeted growth. This can only happen with improvement in infrastructure, rationalisation of taxes and by addressing visa issues. Visa issues are fast becoming the largest bottleneck, preventing tourists from visiting India due to cumbersome processes." He further added, "We also need to look at what the competition is doing and be competitive in a market undergoing a recession. We need to be more proactive when it comes to policy-making for the growth of tourism and also change to embrace more innovative products being offered to India and promote them to the niche segments."



ARJUN SHARMA
Senior Vice President, IATO

Theme interpretation: Indian Tourism – Are we competitive to compete?

The session titled 'Indian Tourism – Are we competitive to compete?' will provide a platform for discussing issues faced by the travel and tourism stakeholders in India. Major issues are high and multiple taxes, high priced hotels, scarce infrastructure, lack of skilled workers and long procedures for visa approvals. Elaborating on the theme, Pronab Sarkar, Vice President and Convention Chairman - IATO, said that the travel and tourism industry in India is growing at a very slow rate. "India has lost its competitiveness despite its world-class Incredible India campaign. Our neighbouring countries are growing at a very fast pace in the tourism business when compared to India. The main reason for this can be traced to their tourism-friendly policies and these destinations are affordable in comparison to India. IATO wishes to discuss and educate its members about how to solve these problems and compete in a safe and



PRONAB SARKAR
Vice President and Convention
Chairman - IATO

honourable fashion." He suggested that India needs tourism-friendly policies such as expanding the Visa-on-Arrival scheme to include more countries, better infrastructure, skilled labour, etc.

Agreeing with Sarkar, Atul Rai, Honorary Joint Secretary, IATO, said,

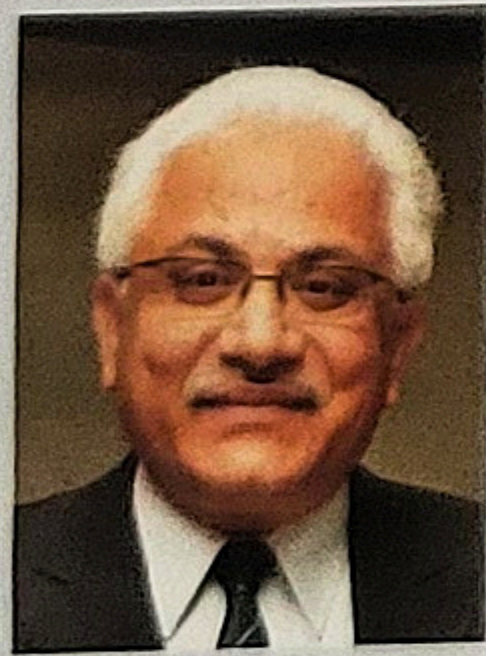
"Indian tourism stakeholders need to examine if they are really competitive to compete with their counterparts in neighbouring countries. We need better infrastructure, reduction in taxes and proactive policy-making to ensure government policies are conducive to progress."



ATUL RAI
Honorary Joint Secretary, IATO

This session will have eminent speakers from India and abroad. One of the prominent speakers will be a foreign tour operator. He will speak about his experience regarding this topic, Rai informed. ■

Expectations



This is the XXVIIth IATO convention and is being held in Gujarat for the first time. It's a great opportunity for the state to showcase its history, culture, wildlife, religious festivities, etc. to the large number of delegates that are expected to attend. A majority of the delegates will be experiencing a new product which they will share with their principals and increase overseas visitors to Gujarat. This year's convention is going to focus on issues affecting the industry and specifically on our theme which is "Are We Competitive To Compete?" We are confident of drawing the government's attention to these issues and are hopeful of a positive response from them.

Tony Marwah

CEO, Indian Travel Promotion Company



The aim of the IATO convention this year is to draw attention to the state of Gujarat. Gujarat, among one of the most industrialized states in India, has a long way to go with ideas and good infrastructure to make it a favourite amongst the tourists. We expect this convention to be a good platform to explore the potential of Gujarat and promote it among domestic and foreign tourists. As per the theme of this year's convention, 'Indian Tourism - Are we competitive to compete?' the focus should be on addressing issues through healthy discussions like how agents and operators can grow their business in India despite losing a lot of traffic to more competitively priced destinations such as Thailand and Singapore.

Sunil Sikka

Head Marketing and Business Development,
ITC WelcomHeritage Hotels



My personal expectations from this convention are very high. Gujarat is an amazing destination which requires some kind of push from the tourism industry. This is a great opportunity for the state to showcase their product to the 1200 plus travel professionals who will be gathering here. Inbound tour operators are always looking for new destinations which can be marketed to overseas tour operators. After the convention, a lot of agents will be taking the FAM tours to update themselves and subsequently market the destination. I think it is a great opportunity to tap the tourism potential and increase visitors to the state. We are already promoting Gujarat, but post the convention, there will be more awareness which will surely benefit the state.

Jatinder Taneja

Member – Executive Council, IATO