

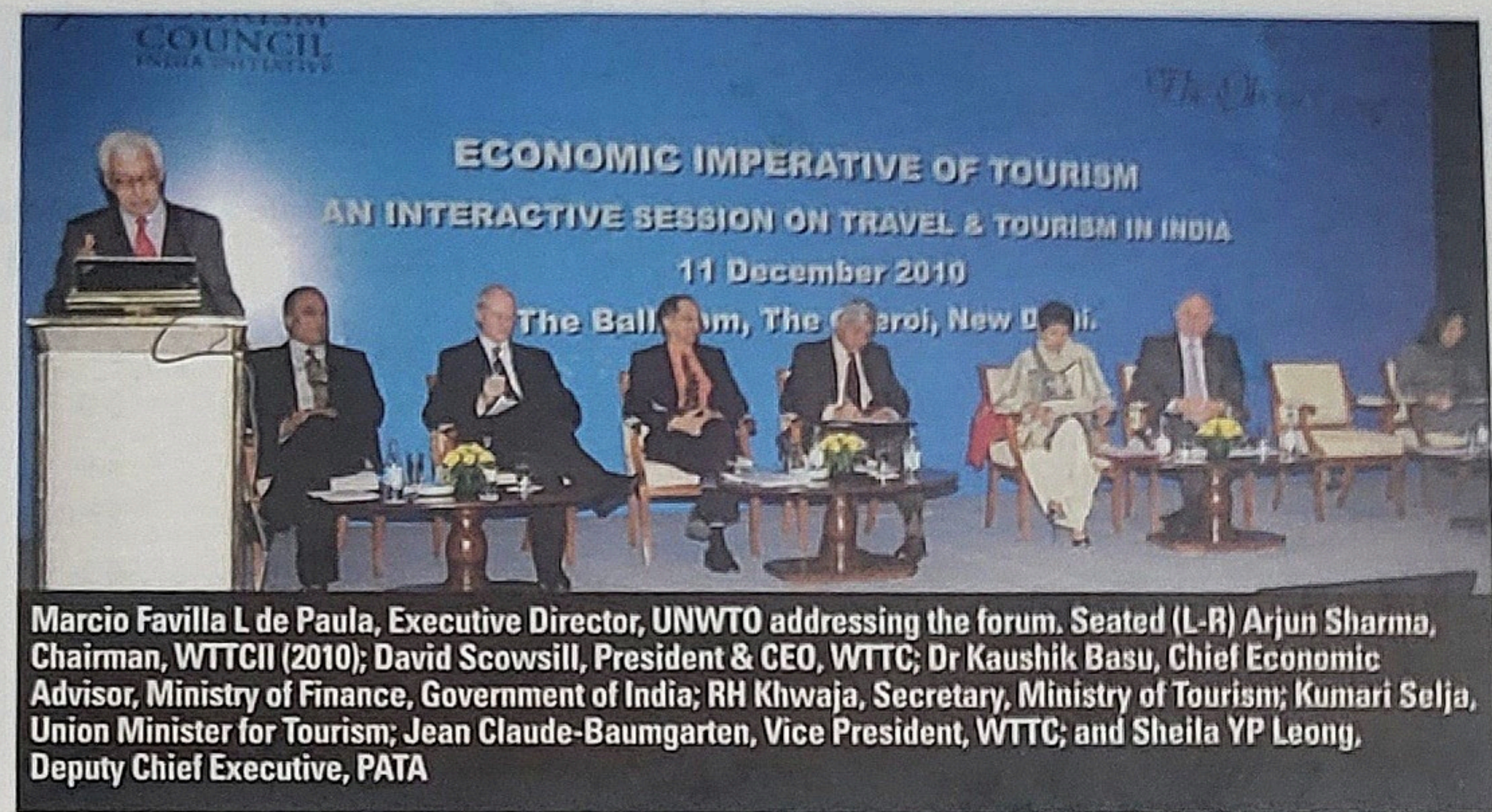
WTTCII conference highlights need to recognise tourism as an economic driver

The 'Economic Imperative of Tourism' conference held last month in New Delhi by World Travel & Tourism Council-India Initiative, had high level govt officials and heads of non-government agencies from India and overseas share their experiences and issues facing the industry.

P Krishna Kumar gives a brief of the conference

THE half-day World Travel & Tourism Council India Initiative (WTTCII) conference- 'Economic Imperative of Tourism' organised last month in New Delhi was attended by top officials from the Ministry of Tourism including Kumari Selja, Union Minister of Tourism and representatives from non-government agencies like WTTC, UNWTO, PATA, etc., leaders and stakeholders of travel and tourism sector of the country. Highlighting

the dire need for 'convergence' on issues related to tourism in the country, Arjun Sharma, Chairman, WTTCII (2010), in his introductory presentation, suggested setting up a 'Steering Committee' headed by a Principal Secretary-level official in the Prime Minister's office to sort out issues which require convergence of opinion among various departments of the government. He said that key concerns of the industry today are convergence, infrastructure,



Marcio Favilla L de Paula, Executive Director, UNWTO addressing the forum. Seated (L-R) Arjun Sharma, Chairman, WTTCII (2010); David Scowsill, President & CEO, WTTC; Dr Kaushik Basu, Chief Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Government of India; RH Khwaja, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism; Kumari Selja, Union Minister for Tourism; Jean Claude-Baumgarten, Vice President, WTTC; and Sheila YP Leong, Deputy Chief Executive, PATA

awareness creation, skill development and taxation. Sharma also proposed a policy on the lines of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) for 'integrated development' of existing destinations. He also advocated for an 'empowered CEO', be it Mayor, District Collector, Tehsildar, at the destination level to coordinate all activities related to tourism

development in that particular area. He also asked the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India to take the leadership role to constitute a Confederation of India Travel & Tourism Industry (CITTI) to push all issues related to the tourism industry in a unified manner.

Addressing the conference, Selja opined that emerging destinations

like India must strive to make tourism a part and parcel of their national agenda. She said that her Ministry has been striving hard to create synergies between the government and the tourism industry, as well as remove obstacles on the way to realise the vast untapped potential in the tourism sector in India. Elaborating on various initiatives of MoT, Selja mentioned that the Visa on Arrival (VoA) scheme for five countries- Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand and Singapore introduced since January 1, 2010 has been successful, and the facility will be extended to five countries from the 'East' like Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines and Vietnam from January 1, 2011. She also informed that her Ministry would try to set up a meeting of the tourism industry captains with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh soon to help push various demands of the industry to the highest level.

Taking part in the panel discussion, Jean Claude

Baumgarten, Former President and CEO, WTTC said that additional two billion middle class population was expected to emerge out of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations between 2010 and 2030. Citing a Goldman Sachs study, Baumgarten said that this would create 60 million jobs in the travel and tourism sector. He said that the travel and tourism sector is expected to grow at a steady pace of over four per cent in the next ten years globally.

Analysing the growth registered by the travel and tourism sector in the last five decades globally, Marcio Favilla L de Paula, Executive Director, UNWTO said that 'emerging destinations' of the world are destined to benefit more from international arrivals in future. Talking specifically on India inbound, Favilla, former Vice Minister for Tourism of Brazil, said that per capita expenditure by a foreign traveller is the highest in India. He also stressed upon the need to promote and encourage domestic travel to

make the industry more sustainable.

David Scowsill, President and CEO, WTTC in his brief speech appreciated the way Indian travel industry resisted the economic slowdown and the role of domestic tourism in it. Drawing parallels between China and India, Scowsill urged India to recognise tourism as one of the five economic drivers as has been done by China.

Sheila YP Leong, Deputy Chief Executive & Head - Office of Marketing Services, PATA said that South Asia will continue to lead the travel and tourism market in South East Asia. Citing figures, she said that inbound travel to major countries of the Asia-Pacific region has experienced a rebound last year. PATA expected visitor numbers to the region to touch 400 million in 2010, registering a growth of ten per cent compared to 2009.

Giving a different perspective on the tourism potential of India, Dr Kaushik Basu, Chief Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, and Government of India equated tourism



Vikram Oberoi, Jt. Managing Director, Oberoi Hotels, Marcio Favilla L de Paula, Executive Director, UNWTO; David Scowsill, President & CEO, WTTC and Rathi Vinay Jha, Former Chairperson, WTTC India Initiative



Vikram Oberoi, Jt. Managing Director, Oberoi Hotels welcoming Kumari Selja, Union Minister of Tourism, Government of India

sector with oil sector. He mentioned that tourism being a labour intensive sector should get priority that the sector demands. He urged the industry to look at Educational Tourism as a tourism product, as India has a unique advantage as an educational destination. ■