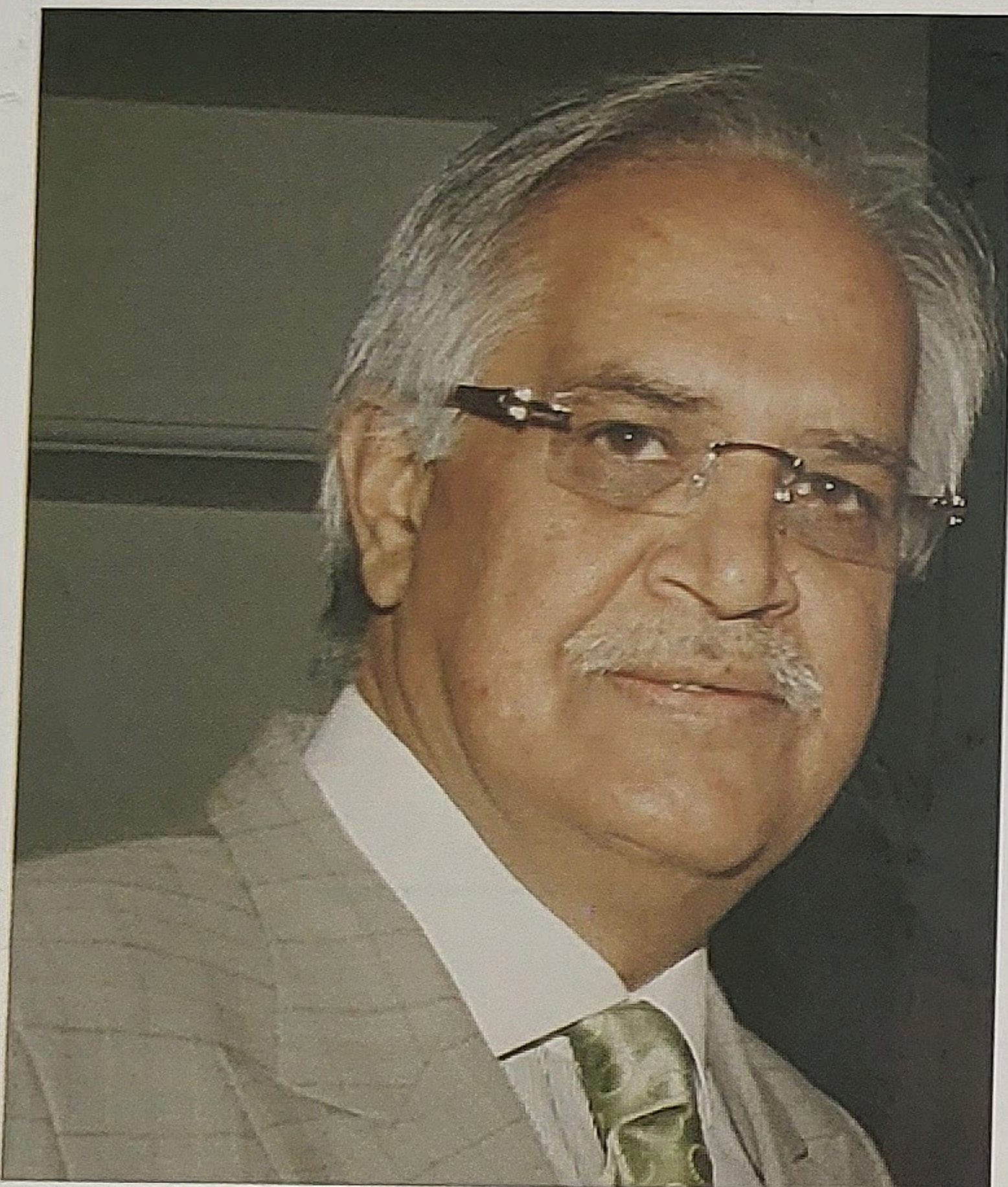


New visionaries to handle IATO; Thakur leaves on a high note

Yes it's time for the change in the management that will handle the operations of Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), with the elections scheduled to take place in early December this year. Proud to leave a legacy of work behind that saw the association flourish and grow, Vijay Thakur, President, IATO, shares some highlights of his tenure at IATO and wishes the best of the contesting lot to replace his position.



❖ PRIYANKA SAXENA



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- Vijay Thakur

In its close to three decades of existence, never has the IATO enjoyed such close relations with the Ministry of Tourism and Government of India as it does now. Though it would be unfair to grant the entire credit for this wonderful work to the President alone, but it was surely under his able guidance that the dedicated and hard working team of IATO, through their concerted efforts and connections, was able to bring the association to this pedestal. "Having been the President for two consecutive terms, I leave today as a happy man for the work executed by myself and my team. The major emphasis in the last four years has been on educating and enhancing the skill and knowledge of a small tour operator in main cities as well in smaller cities too. Also, in the history of IATO, it was for the first time that a presentation was made before the Prime Minister requesting him to increase the tourism budgets. Never has the association enjoyed such good and cordial relations with the MOT as it does today, all because of the dedicated efforts and influential contacts of the senior members of our team."

For maintenance of monumental grandeur of

our country and to discharge the social responsibility befitting a national association, IATO approached Archaeological Survey of India and signed an MOU with them under which the association became responsible for revamping and maintenance of toilets in main monuments in Delhi and Agra, which surely would go a long way in further enhancing the experience of the visitors to these monuments.

Also, after long persuasion from IATO, ASI introduced specially designed common entry tickets for world heritage and other centrally protected monuments.

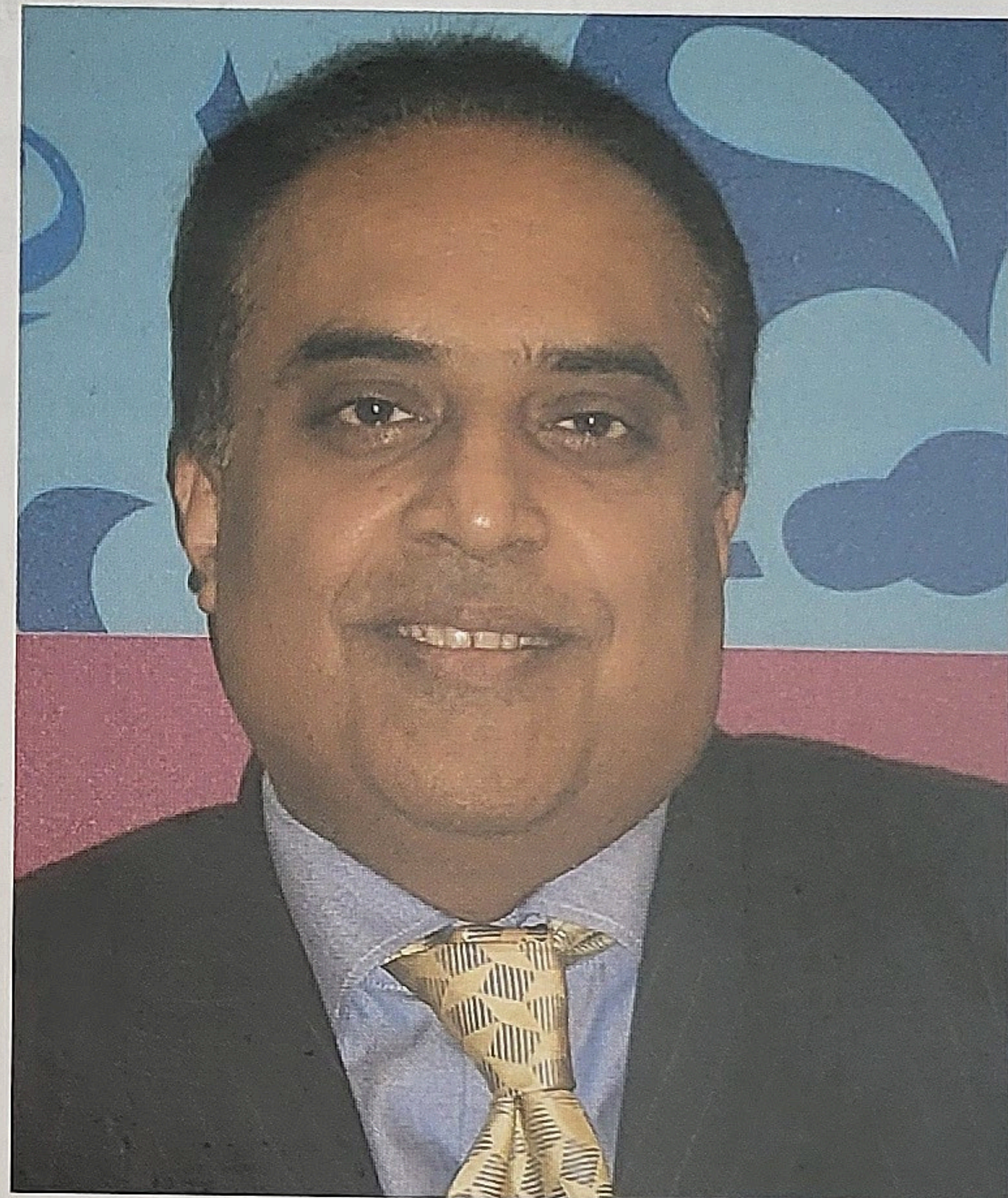
It was during the last four years that IATO got a more progressive looking new logo and started a newsletter which with its fresh design and wide reach soon became a popular means of communication. The reach of the newsletter is such that it finds place with all high commissions, trade embassies, India Tourism offices abroad and more.

During the Visit India Year, 2009, for the first time, in the history of Indian Tourism, a series of road shows were organised by IATO in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and India Tourism offices overseas. A total of 23 road shows were organised in various cities in 12 countries. Over 100 IATO members participated and about 2200 overseas operators were invited for the road shows.

Another highlight of IATO's work in the last few years was its intervention that helped put visa regulations in place. Due to security reasons, some changes were made in visa regulations which were detrimental to tourism industry. With IATO's intervention, visa regulations were streamlined and tourists were allowed re-entry to India within 60 days after visiting the neighbouring countries.

Supplementing this, with a view to offer a platform to the entire membership of IATO, it was for the first time that a grievances and redressal cell was also set up, which was open to all offering a real time response and headed by an office bearer of my Team to lend seriousness of purpose. Success rate of this cell in resolving issues soon became as high as 95 per cent!

So now that he is passing on the baton to the next deserving candidate, whom does he feel is the most suitable to carry on the task? "I think Arjun Sharma is the right candidate to handle the Presidential post of IATO. He is today perhaps the brightest name in the inbound market and with his vision and contacts, I am positive he will do very well. He has always been involved in various activities of IATO and has taken keen interest in its success. The much popular training and seminar sessions were his brainchild, which turned out to be the biggest gift to the small tour operators. He is



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- Arjun Sharma

always focussed on what to give back to the membership and I think no one deserves to head IATO more than him," said Thakur.

Sharing his thoughts on contesting for the post of President IATO, Arjun said, "I am committed to increase the size of the cake for Indian tourism industry and I strongly feel that unless this size grows, we will not be able to grow big," adding, "Tourism India will expand to 12 million arrivals in next five years and we need to prepare our industry to increase the production to cater to this increase. IATO is the premier association that the Government of India turns to for tourism policies and we need to strengthen the DNA to be more meaningful contributor to the growth of Indian Tourism."

Last, appealing to the voters, Thakur said, "I would request you all to follow your own instincts but, at the same time consider the contesting teams on their merits and their actual capacity of deliverance and track record of past 4 years. We need go-getters, who will perform and think about the association first before thinking about their personal benefit."