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FIRST INDIAN PM TO VISIT KUWAIT IN 43 YEARS Modi to visit Kuwait on week-end

NEW DELHI: In the midst of a growing regional tension in the Middle East, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's impending visit to Kuwait this week-end (Dec 21, Saturday and Dec 22, Sunday) stands as a significant opportunity for both the countries to recalibrate their partnership and tackle pressing regional challenges.

Modi is visiting Kuwait at the invitation of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait. This will be the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in 43 years.

The visit is expected to foster closer co-operation in several critical



Kuwait's Foreign Minister His Excellency Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Dehi.

areas, including energy, security and trade while also addressing regional tensions, notably the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

Kuwait's neutral position on regional conflicts and its leadership role within the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) makes it an important partner for India in a region fraught with

tension. The timing of PM Modi's visit could not be more significant. With the Gaza conflict intensifying and broader instability affecting the Arabian Peninsula, India and Kuwait will likely engage in talks on how to manage these crises and contribute to peace-building efforts in the region. Kuwait's role as the current GCC President makes it a pivotal player in shaping the region's response to geopolitical challenges and India's strengthened relationship with the country could prove vital in these uncertain times.

Kuwait has historically maintained a balanced foreign policy, avoiding

entanglements in the region's more contentious issues, which has allowed it to act as a mediator in regional affairs. For India, engaging with Kuwait provides an opportunity to influence GCC policy and deepen co-operation with a country that has been a reliable partner in times of crisis. Moreover, Kuwait's strong stance on humanitarian issues and its willingness to support regional peace initiatives will align with India's broader strategic Economic goals.

One of the central topics of discussion during PM Modi's visit will be energy security. Kuwait, as one of the world's
(Cont. on page-2)

Saudi Red Sea Authority launches new campaign to promote coastal tourism

RIYADH: The Saudi Red Sea Authority (SRSA) has unveiled its ambitious "No Limits" campaign, a major initiative aimed at promoting coastal tourism activities across the Red Sea. Timed to coincide with the inaugural voyage of Aroya, the first Saudi cruise ship to sail the Red Sea, this campaign underscores Saudi Arabia's commitment to positioning its coastline as a leading global tourism destination.

The "No Limits" campaign invites visitors to explore a diverse range of marine tourism experiences, including cruises, yachting, diving, snorkeling, recreational fishing, boating and beach activities. It shines a spotlight on the Red Sea's natural allure, featuring its year-round warm climate, rich coral reefs teeming with marine life and sweeping golden sands that span over 1,800 kms. These

unique coastal offerings aim to attract global travellers while adhering to SRSA's stringent safety, security and environmental sustainability standards.

The Red Sea coast features over 150 beaches, over 1,000 islands and 130 cultural, historical and biological assets. It is rich in natural beauty, enchanting treasures and wonders, over 20 blue holes, over 500 diving sites and diverse culture and heritage, including traditions, customs, architecture, clothing, and over 50 traditional dishes.

This milestone launch marks a new chapter in Saudi Arabia's coastal tourism sector, particularly in cruise-related activities. The debut of Aroya is a symbol of the Kingdom's burgeoning marine tourism industry and complements SRSA's broader vision to regulate, organise and elevate the sec-

tor. The initiative aligns closely with Saudi Vision 2030, which focuses on diversifying the economy, enhancing tourism infrastructure and highlighting the Kingdom's untapped natural treasures.

No limits

A key focus of the campaign is to showcase the locations and activities provided by certified operators, ensuring tourists have access to high-quality, structured coastal experiences. SRSA emphasises that these activities not only deliver enjoyable and memorable adventures but also meet the highest safety protocols, while protecting the delicate marine ecosystem that defines the Red Sea's charm.

In a significant development, SRSA has issued its first Maritime Tourism Agent License to the Red Sea Cruise Company, Cruise Saudi. Additional-
(Cont. on page-7)

UAE visa amnesty ends on Dec 31

DUBAI: A top official at the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) has issued a call to illegal residents, urging them to avail the visa amnesty before it concludes on Dec 31, 2024. The amnesty scheme, which began on Sept 1, was initially set to expire on Oct 31, 2024, but was extended to provide more time for overstayers to regularise their status or return to their home countries without facing penalties or fines.

Lt Gen Mohammed Ahmed Al Marri, Director General of the GDRFA, highlighted the urgency of the situation: "The amnesty is going to end, and overstayers who have not yet regularised their status should utilise the remaining time of the grace period to rectify their residency violations."

Maj Gen Salah Al Qa-

mzi, assistant director general of the Violators and Foreigners Follow-up Sector, highlighted that the upcoming phase will witness intensified inspection campaigns and strict measures against violators who fail to take advantage of this opportunity.

"We are committed to enforcing laws with full transparency and fairness. Our efforts to enhance community security will continue through intensified inspection campaigns, which will commence immediately after the grace period ends," said Al Qamzi. Al Marri also called for community wide support to spread awareness about the amnesty programme.

"Everyone is happy with the amnesty. It has passed smoothly and many illegal residents have taken the initiative seriously and benefited
(Cont. on page-2)



Saudi's FIFA victory

International Federation of Association Football's (Federation Internationale de Football Association) confirmation that Saudi Arabia will host the 2034 FIFA World Cup with zero competing bids is a welcome decision. The soccer governing body also jointly awarded the 2030 World Cup to Portugal, Spain and Morocco. In addition, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina will host a special trio of games to honour the 100th anniversary of the first World Cup, held in Uruguay.

Saudi Arabia was ratified at an extraordinary FIFA Congress two weeks after world football's governing body declared it one of the most standout World Cup bids in history via its evaluation process. It has long been expected that Saudi Arabia would be awarded the tournament. Rival bids have never really emerged to a serious degree and when Australia decided not to put forward their own candidacy last October, Saudi Arabia was given a clear run. Nevertheless, such a seemingly straightforward decision has the potential to be one of the most controversial in modern FIFA history. Since FIFA's evaluation of Saudi Arabia's proposal achieved a record 4.2 out of five — the governing body called it “a unique, innovative and ambitious vision” — coupled with the fact that there was no opposing bid, it was a formality that the kingdom would be selected.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino is long said to have supported the idea of a World Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's aggressive expansion across major sporting properties, from the influx of global stars to the Saudi Pro League to its Formula One Grand Prix, LIV Golf, women's tennis and combat sports extravaganzas such as Tyson Fury vs. Oleksandr Usyk, means a successful World Cup bid has long seemed inevitable.

Crown Prince His Highness Mohammed bin Salman spearheaded a policy called Vision 2030 back in 2016. The idea is to promote and strengthen Saudi Arabia's political standing abroad, appease the changing attitudes of its younger generation and all while encouraging greater private investment to ease the country's dependency on its lucrative but volatile oil industry. Under the crown prince, Saudi Arabia has embraced global sports. Events have been a showcase for the country's small progressive reforms and an opportunity to win support from people abroad. As the number of leagues and governing bodies co-operating with Saudi Arabia has grown, so has the scrutiny. World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) held its first event in Saudi Arabia just a month later. Since then, they have held firm on a deal where the Saudis pay roughly \$50 million annually for two events.

Saudi Arabia bought English club Newcastle United and signed Portuguese soccer legend Cristiano Ronaldo to play for one of its teams. The Saudis have also jumped into the American sports world, specifically golf. The Saudis pledged that the World Cup a decade from now will be inclusive. The country's sports minister said they “welcome everyone” to come see the “transformation” of Saudi Arabia.

More commonly known by its acronym FIFA, it is the international self-regulatory governing body of association football, beach soccer etc. It was founded in 1904 to oversee international competition among the national associations of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain (represented by the Madrid Football Club), Sweden and Switzerland.

LIPSYNCH

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”
— Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Switzerland withdraws MFN status to India

BERN: Switzerland has decided to withdraw the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status granted to India, a move that will have significant tax implications for Indian companies operating in the European nation.

This decision comes after an adverse ruling from the Indian Supreme Court regarding a tax dispute involving Nestlé, the Swiss food giant headquartered in Vevey. From Jan 1, 2025, Indian businesses in Switzerland will face

higher withholding tax rates, particularly on dividend income, signalling a shift in the tax landscape for bilateral trade and investments.

Switzerland's federal department of finance (DFF) announced that it would suspend the application of the MFN clause in the tax treaty between Switzerland and India, specifically within the context of the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA). The decision follows the Supreme Court's Oct 2023

ruling, which effectively reversed a previous interpretation that allowed Indian entities to benefit from lower tax rates based on subsequent tax treaties between Switzerland and other nations.

This ruling has led Switzerland to withdraw its unilateral application of the MFN clause. As a result, from Jan 2025, income generated by Indian entities in Switzerland will be subject to a higher withholding tax rate, specifically a 10pc tax on dividends.

UAE visa amnesty ends on...

(Cont. from page-1)

from it,” said Al Marri. “Many who availed of the amnesty have secured jobs and are now doing well in life.”

However, he expressed concern about individuals who continue to ignore the initiative, doubting its legitimacy. “There are people who still come to my office asking whether the amnesty is real. They should understand that we are here to help you,” he said. Al Marri mentioned the humanitarian aspect of the amnesty, sharing stories of families and children who

have benefited from the initiative. “We have connected individuals without passports to their respective embassies. They went home happily.”

He highlighted cases of children whose situations were particularly challenging. “We have seen children who did not know their fathers and were cared for by their mothers. These children had no visas to take vaccines, but Dubai Health provided them vaccines. It was our duty to take care of them.”

The Director General praised the efforts of

his team in helping overstayers regularise their status or return home. “I am really proud of the team who helped people go back home,” he said, urging communities to propagate the message of amnesty.

Al Marri issued a strong reminder: “It is our duty to make lives easy for others. People who do not avail of this amnesty will blame themselves in the future. It is less than 15 days for the initiative to get over. Come, regularise your status, get rid of fines and start a new life.”

CRUCIAL TALKS, DECISIONS EXPECTED Modi to visit Kuwait on week-end

(Cont. from page-1)

leading oil exporters, plays a key role in meeting India's energy demands. Energy security remains a critical issue for India, which relies heavily on oil imports from the Gulf. Given the volatility in global energy markets and the growing push for alternative energy sources, discussions are expected to revolve around ensuring a stable energy supply and exploring new avenues for co-operation in the renewable energy sector.

The two countries are also expected to focus on economic collaboration beyond the energy sector. India and Kuwait have already established a growing trade rela-

tionship, and both sides are keen to further diversify their economic engagements. Kuwait's sovereign wealth funds present an opportunity for investment in India's infrastructure, technology and renewable energy sectors. Similarly, India's growing digital economy and start-up ecosystem offer a potential avenue for Kuwaiti investments, which could further bolster bilateral trade.

The visit also offers a chance to explore co-operation in other emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, IT, information technology and space exploration, all of which are high on India's national agenda.

Beyond economic mat-

ters, security co-operation is expected to be a central aspect of PM Modi's visit. As India faces growing challenges in the Indian Ocean and the broader Middle East, strengthening defence and security ties with Kuwait has become increasingly important. The two countries have already seen an uptick in strategic engagements, including the recent visit of the Indian naval ship INS Visakhapatnam to Kuwait. During his visit, PM Modi will likely discuss enhancing maritime security co-operation and addressing regional security challenges such as terrorism and piracy, which are common threats for both nations.

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Japanese Yen	55.18	54.49
Swiss Franc (CHF)	95.25	93.47
Canadian Dollar	59.50	58.34
Australian Dollar	53.51	52.51
Norwegian Krone	7.56	7.41
Swedish Krona	7.73	7.58
New Zealand Dollar	48.26	47.41
Hong Kong Dollar	11.04	10.83
Singapore Dollar	63.04	61.82
Saudi Arabian Riyal	22.86	22.42
United Arab Emirates	23.37	22.92

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Jaishankar greets Qatar on its National Day

NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar extended National Day greetings to Qatar, highlighting

the historical ties and close co-operation between the two nations while reaffirming India's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. In a post on X, Jaishankar wrote, "National Day greetings to PM and FM @MBA_AlThani, the government and the people of Qatar. Deeply value our historical ties

and close co-operation." India and Qatar share warm and friendly relations, marked by regular high-level interactions to further strengthen their partnership. Their most recent interaction occurred during Jaishankar's official tour to Qatar and Bahrain from Dec 6 to 9. During the visit, he met Qatar's Minister of Commerce Faisal bin Thani Al Thani and Minister of State, Ahmed Al Sayed, on the sidelines of the Doha Forum.



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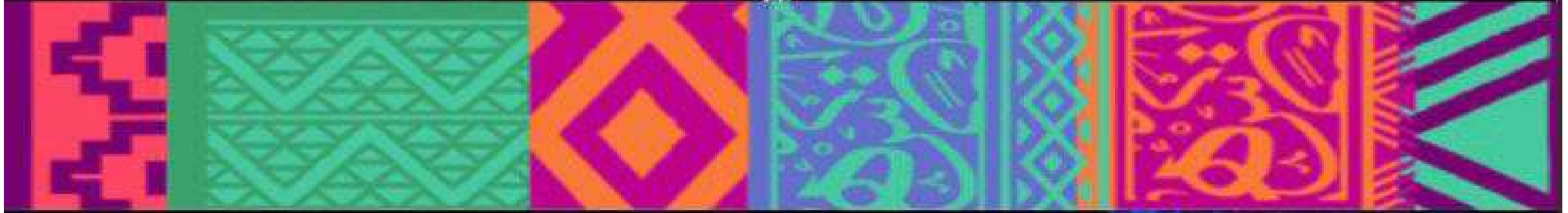
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Explore The Unexplored
SOUTH INDIA

GULF FAQs

All about UAE's mandatory health insurance from 2025

Can you explain the salient features of new mandatory health insurance in UAE?

From 2025, employees and domestic workers across the UAE will be covered under a health insurance plan. Starting Jan 1, employers in Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah will be required to get their employees a health insurance policy as a prerequisite for issuing or renewing residency permits.

Abu Dhabi and Dubai had previously implemented similar policies.

Though the announcement by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (Mohre) does not specify it, industry executives expect that the mandatory scheme will extend to family members. This means employees themselves may need to bring their families under an insurance plan as companies are required to get insurance only for them.

Neeraj Gupta, CEO of Policybazaar.ae, said health insurance is required for sponsors during the visa process of their dependents and families. "It's a good initiative at a very competitive price that will definitely help people get access to health coverage," he added. Hitesh

Motwani, chief marketing officer at Insurancemarket.ae, said it will be in line with Dubai and Abu Dhabi where sponsors are required to arrange health insurance of their families and dependents.

Echoing his peers, Moin ur Rehman, executive director of Unitrust Insurance Broker, said sponsors in the Northern Emirates need to secure health insurance for their family members as per UAE health insurance regulations.

Health insurance coverage is a prerequisite for visa issuance or renewal in the Northern Emirates. Mohre said the basic health insurance package starts from as low as Dh320 per year. Under the basic insurance plan, there is no waiting period for workers suffering from chronic illnesses. It covers individuals aged one to 64 years, while those over this age must complete a medical disclosure form and attach recent medical reports. The package covers treatment expenses with a 20pc co-payment for inpatient care (i.e. patients hospitalised for medical treatment or surgeries). The insured pays a maximum of Dh500 per visit with an annual cap of Dh1,000, including medications. Beyond these limits, the insurance company covers 100pc of treatment costs.

As for outpatient care (patients requiring medi-

cal visits, diagnostic tests or minor procedures that do not necessitate a hospital stay), the co-payment is 25pc, where the insured pays a maximum of Dh100 per visit. No co-payment is required for follow-up visits for the same condition within seven days, while co-payments for medications are capped at 30pc with an annual cap of Dh1,500.

Moin ur Rehman added that the Dh320 health insurance package is "competitive and affordable" for sponsors who are seeking health insurance primarily for visa purposes as it provides coverage for inpatient and emergency treatments.

"While this plan may fulfil the basic regulatory requirements, sponsors should carefully assess whether the limited coverage is sufficient to address their family's overall healthcare needs," he added.

Neeraj Gupta of Policybazaar stated that Dh320 is "indeed a very competitive and affordable health insurance plan for sponsors' families in the Northern Emirates. This pricing makes it highly accessible, ensuring that a larger portion of the population can secure essential health coverage for their dependents. Such affordability is crucial in expanding healthcare access to all, aligning with the UAE's goal of universal health insurance coverage".

them shall be punished with imprisonment and/or a fine of not less than Dh2 lakh or more than Dh2 million."

The same penalties shall be imposed on whoever: Uses without authorisation any credit, electronic or debit card or any other e-payment instrument or any of its data or information with the intention of obtaining for himself or for third parties any funds or properties of others or to utilise the services made available to third parties by these cards or instruments."

Furthermore, financial institutions in the UAE are obligated to create awareness among their customers and the public related to financial crimes. This is in accordance with Clause 6.2.2.6 of the Consumer Protection Regulation issued by the Central Bank of UAE through its Circular No. 8 of 2020 to all licensed Financial Institutions in the UAE, which states: "Licensed financial institutions must demonstrate they have carried out sufficient consumer awareness activities related to educating consumers of the need to protect themselves from financial crime."

The financial institution in accordance with clause 6.2.2.5 of the Consumer Protection Regulations of financial institutions must maintain up-to-date security systems and be prepared to implement new cyber security strategies as needed. This ensures they can effectively protect against evolving threats. "Licensed financial institutions must ensure their security and protection systems are updated and have the capacity to develop and adopt new approaches to cyber security as required."

In addition, financial institutions may have to compensate their customers in case of any

financial loss to the customers due to financial crimes. However, financial institutions are not liable to pay compensation for financial loss arising out of financial crimes if it is due to gross negligence or fraudulent behaviour of the customers. This is in accordance with Clause 6.2.2.4 of the Consumer Protection Regulations of Financial Institutions, which states: "Licensed financial institutions must compensate consumers in a timely manner for financial losses and expenses resulting from financial crimes, misappropriation, cyber-attacks and misuse of assets and information unless it can be proven that the loss was due to the gross negligence or fraudulent behaviour of the consumers."

Based on the aforementioned provisions of law, the bank may be obligated to compensate you for your financial losses resulting from a cybercrime/scam, provided that the loss was not due to your gross negligence or fraudulent behaviour. If you believe that your actions did not constitute gross negligence, the bank may be liable to return the money you lost. To pursue this, you may file a formal complaint with your bank, which may then conduct an investigation into the incident.

If you already have filed complaint and the bank has concluded the matter, but you are not satisfied, you may approach Central Bank of UAE for further investigation and resolution. Additionally, you may need to report the matter to the police, submitting transaction details and evidence.

Credit card scams and bank's obligations

I recently lost some money in a banking scam in UAE. The bank has concluded that I was at fault for losing the money as I entered my credit card details on a website without making sure it was legitimate. In cases like these, would the bank be legally obliged to return the

money I lost? Can you explain the legal options available to me?

In the UAE, it is a crime if anyone hacks e-payment transactions applications or websites. This may lead to imprisonment and/or payment of fines by an individual or group of individuals who have indulged in such a crime. This is

in accordance with Article 15 (2) of the Federal Decree Law No. 34 of 2021 on Countering rumours and Cybercrimes related to Hacking E-Payment Instruments, which states: "Whoever forges, clones or copies any credit card, debit card, or any e-payment or captures its data or information using any of

Glossaries-Non-resident Accounts-Personal Mobility Score (PMS)-The Schengen visa

(Continue from Issue No. 88: DEC 17, 2024) How much mobility does an Indian passport have? The answer is 73.



The Schengen visa
An authorization granted by a Schengen state that permits visitors to enter the Schengen area

for short stays or transit. The following Schengen visa types are permitted for transit or short-term visits: The Schengen

international transit area of an airport within the Schengen region is permitted with the Schengen Airport transit visa. The Schengen multiple-entry visa: As long as the visa is valid, the Schengen multiple-entry visa permits multiple visits to the Schengen region.

The Schengen area consists of 29 European nations that do not have border controls and have a common legal system. "Schengen Member States" are the nations that grant Schengen visas. Entry into the Schengen area is not guaranteed by a Schengen visa. If a visa holder fails to present proof of purpose, border officials have the right to deny entry. Entry may also be denied if the trip's

details do not satisfy additional requirements. A Schengen visa can be used

states—Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland—are these 29 EU nations. As of March 31, 2024, Bulgaria and Romania are fully implementing the Schengen acquisition and restrictions are no longer

There are a lot of reasons to travel. Some people travel for work, while others do so for leisure. While some people travel to escape from life, others do so to further their education. Some people travel for work-related reasons as well. Whether it is for work, entertainment, education, or job searching, travel is a great way to learn a lot of things in life. Travel gives us the opportunity to experience a wide range of things and discover the world beyond our wildest dreams, regardless of the reason. There are many acronyms and jargon used in the travel and tourism and overseas manpower recruitment industries. SKILLS GURU hopes this glossary will be useful to those who are not familiar with it.

for brief visits or transit through its territory is known as a Schengen visa. It is an entry permit that allows non-EU nationals (non-European Union) to visit the Schengen area

short-stay visa: A stay of up to 90 days during any 180-day period is permitted with the Schengen short-stay visa. The Schengen Airport transit visa: Travel through the



for travel, family visits, business travel, seasonal employment, transit, medical care, education, training, placements, and volunteer work.

As members of the Schengen area, 29 European nations currently grant Schengen visas. 25 of the 27 EU member

in place at the internal air and sea borders with these two member states. With a unanimous Council decision, controls at these Member States' internal land borders may be further relaxed. (To Be Continued as: KNOW YOUR SCHENGEN)

Domestic tourism to outpace India's economic growth by 15pc

NEW DELHI: Domestic tourism in India is poised to grow exponentially, outpacing the nation's economic growth by 15pc over the next five years, according to Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Tourism & Culture.

Addressing gathering at the BOTT Knowledge Conclave: Tourism@2025, held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, the minister spotlighted India's unprecedented strides in the tourism sector, cementing the nation's position as a global travel hub.

"India has witnessed a remarkable 95.64pc increase in domestic tourist numbers, propelling the country's ranking on the Global Travel and Tourism Development Index from 65 to 39. Investments exceeding Rs6,800 crore have been directed towards des-



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

development, with additional projects worth Rs 3,295.76 crore approved to enhance lesser-known tourism sites across states. Initiatives like the e-tourist visa facility have greatly benefited international visitors," said Shekhawat.

Highlighting the sector's pivotal role in economic growth, the minister emphasised a paradigm shift from

monumental tourism to experiential tourism. He also acknowledged emerging trends in MICE tourism and

medical tourism, while underscoring the need for enhanced infrastructure to meet global standards.

Rupee hits new low at 85.06 per dollar

MUMBAI: The Indian rupee fell past 85 to the US dollar for the first time on Thursday after US Federal Reserve indicated a more measured pace of rate cuts, triggering uncertainty across financial markets.

4.25-4.50pc. The rupee was trading at 85.06 per dollar a little after 11am. The yield on the 10-year benchmark government bond rose by four basis points and was trading at 6.79pc. "The (US Fed's) tone was hawk-



The US cut interest rates by 25 basis points to bring down the Fed Funds rate to

ish, now they are saying only two rate cuts in 2025, which is very shallow," said a dealer at a state-owned bank. "The pressure on the rupee will remain and now the next level will be 85.50 per dollar," a banker said.

Saudi Red Sea Authority...

(Cont. from page-1)

ly, the authority awarded its inaugural Leisure Tourism Technical License to the Aroya cruise ship. These licensing milestones reflect SRSA's commitment to ensuring seamless operations for operators and enhanced services for travellers.

As Saudi Arabia continues its transformation into a top-tier travel hub,

the "No Limits" campaign is a bold invitation to explore the wonders of the Red Sea, where coastal adventures meet world-class hospitality. With investments in infrastructure, stringent quality standards, and pioneering developments such as the Aroya cruise ship, SRSA is charting an exciting course for the future of marine tourism.