

# NICCI e-Newsflash



## Stakeholders seek enhanced bilateral tourism between Nepal and India

Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce & Industry in association with the Embassy of India, Kathmandu organized a program entitled “Enhancing Nepal-India Bilateral cooperation in Tourism II” on Thursday, 9th June 2016 in Kathmandu; the follow up session of its first session held last year.

It was the formal session of the workshop on “Enhancing Nepal-India Bilateral Cooperation in Tourism -Part 2” held 3 days before on the 6th June, 2016 at Hotel Annapurna between various stakeholders from the Tourism Sector. Through this program, NICCI recommended the government to enhance cooperation with the government of India to boost the inflow of tourists from the southern neighbour as well as encourage investment in the tourism sector.

It has also recommended some crucial steps that need to be addressed to give a boost to the tourism sector. The program was the culmination of the sincere efforts of core group of tourism entrepreneurs and tourism officials of the Government of Nepal and India.

In the program, the government has been urged to work with state tourism bodies in India to bring more tourists from India as many people there are still unaware of Nepal as a tourism

destination.

As per projections presented in the program, The number of outbound travellers from India has been growing and is expected to reach 50 million by 2020. Indian travellers will be second biggest spenders after Chinese on overseas travel reaching \$91 billion by 2030, as per the World Travel and Tourism Council.

It may be noted that of the 800,000 visitors that come to Nepal every year, only 8.67 per cent are from India. Moreover, the number of Indian travellers to Nepal has dropped significantly in the last two years.

In recent year, the Indian government has allowed two million government employees to travel to Nepal along with other South Asian nations like Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka on Leave Travel Concession (LTC) scheme. However, the programme has not been effectively implemented. The initiatives taken by Nepal to bring more tourists under the LTC scheme seem negligible.

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As informed in the program, at present, Nepali carriers are permitted to fly to 21 destinations in India as per the air service agreement. However, due to the fact that an aircraft is allowed to enter Nepali airspace only via Simara, it is unviable for domestic carriers to operate flights to the nearest Indian cities.

Though there are five exit points, Bhairahawa, Biratnagar, Kakarbhitta, Janakpur and Mahendranagar for international airlines, Simara is the only entry point for aircraft flying into Nepal. NICCI has asked authorities to manage various entry points to establish air connectivity with Indian cities from Kathmandu and aforementioned exit points.

Similarly, improving air connectivity with Indian cities could be instrumental to increase the flow of Indian tourists in the country, as per the chamber.

Currency has also been identified as another hassle in enhancing relations with India. Nepalis travelling to India cannot withdraw more than INR 10,000 per day from ATMs. On the other hand, Indians flying into Nepal are allowed to carry a maximum of INR 25,000 in cash. Moreover, those travelling via land complain of restrictions in bringing large denominations of Indian currency. Though the ban in higher denominations has lifted a year before, but since the same has not been circulated properly at the border customs and security people, they tend to torture Indian tourists and Nepali who are back to home in Nepal with higher denominations of Indian currency.

Besides, foreign nationals holding tourist visa of India with multiple entry facility should have a gap of at least two months between visits to the southern neighbour. This provision has been hindering Nepal in joining hands with Indian tourism promotion bodies for joint promotion and introducing joint travel packages.

It was also suggested that if India relaxes the provision, especially in tourist visa, tourists who visit India can come to Nepal as well and Nepal and India could also jointly launch tourism promotion programmes in the global market.

NICCI has also recommended the government of India to revoke the travel advisory that has been issued on travelling to Kailash Mansarovar via Nepal.

Nepal and India signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance cooperation in the field of tourism on November 25, 2014, and a joint working group comprising government and private sector of both countries has been formed for the im-



plementation of issues that are identified to boost tourism sector.

Delivering the welcome remarks as the Tourism Convener at NICCI, Mrs. Shreejana Rana said "The Tourism Industry in Nepal have had to and continue to face many challenges. The massive earthquake and the bitter circumstances preceding it has further added to the obstacle. However each one is doing as best as they can to revive the Nepal Tourism sector. Also all from the Tourism stakeholders are well aware that sustenance and survival is difficult, unless all stakeholders work together in chalking out a course that will

benefit all the Tourism Sector as a whole. The need of the hour is to expand, promote and strengthen tourism with our closest neighbor- India with whom we share close ties and relations for generations."

She informed about the past series of the efforts and said that a similar workshop in the past was held and recommendations were drawn to ensure the Nepal Tourism Industry flourishes, and as a result the formal Memorandum of Understanding was signed between India and Nepal in the last SAARC Summit held in Nepal.

She further said "Few of the recommendations have been implemented. For example, the coach service to various cities to and fro from both countries to the legal acceptance to NRS. 500 and 1000 denomination notes in Nepal etc. However we are yet to bear witness to many other recommendations come to life.

It is time again for the Nepal Tourism stakeholders to review the outcomes from the first JWC meeting held on the 19th February, 2015 in New Delhi, India, so that fresh pragmatic recommendations for the government of our side is drawn which would further revive and promote the Tourism sector of our country, prior to the second JWC meeting to be held before end of February 2017."

Lauding the effective coordination with the government departments, Mrs. Shreejana Rana said "It is easy to question and criticise our governments. But I can confidently say that approaching and working with our tourism related ministries or departments have never been a problem. This undertaking stands as a fine example of what government and the private sector can achieve when they work together. One has the influence and the means to get things done; the other a wealth of experience and knowledge. We can do much separately but together we can be unbeatable."

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Reiterating the series of events in the last couple of years in tourism, Mrs Rana said that it began in July 2013 when the Embassy of India invited a group of Nepali private entrepreneurs to New Delhi to meet Mr. Parvesh Dewan, Tourism Secretary of India and asked the team that how India could help and support the promotion of bilateral tourism between our two nations. She further said, once the team returned, she organised a workshop on behalf of NICCI and included all major tourism organisations and individuals in Nepal. The result of the deliberations was a draft proposal which they presented to the then Minister for Tourism Mr. Ram Kumar Shrestha and the Indian Ambassador Mr. Ranjit Rae.

Being delighted over the achievements, Mrs. Rana Said "It was a proud moment for all of us involved when, during the SAARC Summit in November 2014, our governments signed an MOU to promote and strengthen Indo-Nepal Bilateral Tourism." She further said "We've seen over the years how crucial Indian tourists are keen to our tourism industry. Both our nations can only gain and be enriched by an increase in bilateral visitors. NICCI has worked for decades to improve economic relations between India and Nepal. It recognizes that the Travel and Tourism Industry plays a vital role in the economic and social development of our country. So it is committed to improving bilateral tourism between our nations."

According to Mrs. Rana, the following were the achievements:

- The Embassy of India and NICCI organised an interaction programme on 29 January 2015. Those of us in the travel and tourism industry met to discuss the MOU and the expansion of Bilateral Cooperation in Tourism between India and Nepal.
- In accordance with the MOU, each nation established joint working groups. Now, there is a forum to discuss the status of bilateral tourism, the challenges and the proposals to resolve them. The first meeting of the two Joint

Working Groups took place in February 2015 in New Delhi. Mr Umakant Parajuli the then Joint Secretary headed the Nepalese group of which the tourism entrepreneurs of Nepal including Tourism Convener at NICCI had the honour to be the part of. It was at this meeting that the team developed and signed an MOU on the procedures and course of action to make the promotion of bilateral tourism a successful reality. One of the decisions was that the Joint Working Groups would meet every two years; with the next meeting to be in Nepal in 2017.

- Last month NICCI with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Aviation and the Department of Tourism decided to take the lead to prepare for the next Joint Working Group meeting. The Nepalese working group held a workshop 3 days before on Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016, to review previous initiatives and achievements in tourism field in the past couple of years as well as current status and also to discuss the pending issues and prepare recommendations prior to the second Joint Committee Meeting (JWC) on Indo- Nepal Bilateral Tourism Expansion and Promotion to be held as mentioned above. Also, rather than scatter resources and attention, the group identified areas that Nepal should concentrate on for the best outcome.

The result was a draft proposal with Nepalese Working Group's suggestions and conclusions, which was presented in the formal session on 9<sup>th</sup> June. These are the views and suggestions of major players in our Travel and Tourism Industry; the Ministry for Tourism, Culture and Aviation, the Department of Tourism, Nepal Tourism Board, Nepalese tourism associations, the airlines that fly into India, and individual experts.

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The welcome remarks was followed by presentation and floor discussion

### Floor Discussion



Speaking from the floor, **Mr. Sugat Ratna Kansakar, General Manager, Nepal Airlines Corporation** informed that they are flying to Mumbai and Bangalore where knows that a lot of people in middle and upper middle class who use to fly Singapore and Bangkok frequently but their younger generations don't know about Nepal, what are the things to see here, where as on the other side, one of his old friend from travel agency sector in India was

in Nepal after 20 years, and was wondering to see developments in Nepal for tourism sector, like two bunjy jumps, paragliding in Sarangkot with natural beauties for which they don't need to go to Switzerland, cable cars, honeymoon spots etc., about which nobody knows there. So he suggested for proper promotion of tourism packages in India with 15-20 seconds promotional advertisement through popular channels like Star Plus, Zee-news etc. for which the Government of Nepal need to take initiative.

### Mr. Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO, Nepal Tourism Board

stressed to ease out the pending issues of LTC and in this connection and requested His Excellency Ambassador for his initiative in this regard to to sort out this very soon and also suggested to improve infrastructure for surface transportation to promote border area tourism in Nepal and India.



**Mr. Ashish Sinha, First Secretary, Commerce at Embassy of India**, following the Joint working Group meeting which happened in Delhi it was decided that a focus group would be formed involving private sectors stake holders in each country, said that they had written to the Government of Nepal to inform about composition of private sector team from Nepal so that their private sector people could directly be in touch with the private sector tourism entrepreneurs in Nepal as a parallel mechanism and their recommendation could be feed into the Government mechanism.

Mr. Sinha also informed about their request to Government of Nepal and reiterated to suggest the nearest point to Lumbini

out of two, namely, Chakar-chauraha or Kakrahawa, which they want to make as immigration point for facilitating third country tourist for which they have been waiting the response from quite some time.



Regarding only one inbound air route, Mr. Sinha clarified that in the Air Service Agreement itself, more air routes are already given and they have informed it to concerned authorities in Government of Nepal. So if there is any confusion, need clarification to the problem, Mr. Sinha suggested to write to Embassy of India so that the issue, if it exists, could be taken with the Indian authorities.

Speaking on the bus service route, he informed the gathering "You know there are already three routes operational in Kathmandu-Delhi, Kathmandu- Varanasi and Mahendranagar-Delhi sector. The fourth route would be operational very soon for which discussions have almost been concluded between Uttar Pradesh State Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) and Prithivi Rajmarg Yatayat Byabastha Samitee at Pokhara. So I think sometime in July they are planning to flag off the first service between Pokhara and Delhi."

Keeping in view the recent incidents in the northern zones in Nepal with the trekkers, he said that his colleagues in embassy who deal with the consular issues and who were responsible for rescuing the Indian citizens stuck there that if they could list out the authorized agencies or Sherpas accompanying those trekkers with their contact numbers are informed to the embassy in advance so that they could rescue whenever they stuck.



**Mr. Ghanshyam Upadhyay, Jt. Secretary, Ministry of Tourism** appreciated the idea of Ramayana Circuit floated by His Excellency and proposed to jointly carry the operational strategies for this. Citing the

example that when we travel to France, Mr. Upadhyay said we also desire to travel adjoining countries/territories like Belgium, Switzerland etc, he proposed having joint promotional campaigns and packages to serve different tastes to the tourists in Nepal and India.

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**Mr. Basant Raj Mishra, Chairperson, Temple Tiger Group of Companies** appreciated the joint initiatives the Ministry of Tourism, Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the Embassy of India have taken for achieving so much within the short period of time of three years. He further said "Although we have started, we had met Mr. Prabesh Ji in the beginning and I really did not expect that much achievements so soon. We have resolved many many things and I fully agree with His Excellency"



Mr. Mishra stressed on the promotion of tourism through hassle free permission for shooting of films to Indian and other producers as this is one of the most effective and cost effective medium of mass communication to reach to the people, like Hare Rama Hare Krishna, Johny Mera Naam etc. He also suggested for appropriate state-wise and season-based strategies and packages with target number of tourists and their types from each prominent state than a blanket strategy for India as a whole.

Appreciating the progress made in resolving the higher denomination currency problem that was being faced by the people of both sides of Nepal and India, Mr. Mishra also emphasized the speedy implementation of LTC policy which was already announced from the highest possible authorities in the government and bureaucracy in India, but not been implemented so far and requested to look into whereabouts of the implementation file of LTC, which could benefit the tourism sector in Nepal immediately for long term; as well as the Indian people could feel brotherhood, various similarities, natural beauties in their nearest destination.

Delivering his remarks to the gathering, **Indian Ambassador Mr. Ranit Rae** said "Perhaps the very first event that I participated after taking over my responsibilities as Ambassador of India was Tourism promotion almost 3 years ago and I am quite delighted that significant progress has been achieved and trying to step up cooperation in this sector between our two countries. However, I saw in the presentation, several things are yet to be done." Mr. Rae further said, "The way we look at Tourism it's much more than earning Rupees and Dollars. It is really connecting the two countries, strengthening its people to people relationship and indeed becoming the strong foundation for the relationship that we have. So we are very committed to strengthening cooperation in this sector."

"While going through the figure of Indian tourist travelling

abroad mentioned in the presentation here, the number of days, the amounts of money they spend abroad etc, obviously there is a huge opportunity for a country like Nepal. It might be useful for the tourism department to undertake a study, in terms of what kind of Indian tourist come to Nepal, is it mainly for pilgrimage, or adventure or some other tourism, which states of India that they come from and perhaps when you have more detail profile of nature of Indian tourist coming here; you could divide strategies in terms of how to attract larger number, how to get them to spend more time in Nepal and most important how to get them to open their wallets a little more. So I think this kind of targeted strategy would indeed be extremely useful." His Excellency suggested.

Regarding pending issues His Excellency Rae further informed "Now the connectivity across the Mahakali in the far west of Nepal is pretty poor, I have travelled in that area, I have been there on the Banbasa Bridge so I think much more needs to be done and I am happy to inform you that a lot is being done. So we have now engaged in the process for the construction of 4 lane motorable bridge across the Mahakali, South of Banbasa. This will connect Dodhara Chandani on the other side of the river to a point in south of Banbasa. We have received a DPR-detail project report from the government of Nepal. That is currently on study and consideration. So I think once this project moves ahead perhaps 2/3 years down the road the situation will be very different in the far west of Nepal."

Clarifying development plans and encouraging entrepreneurs, Guest of Honour Mr. Rae said "In addition to this, there are several bridges over the Mahakali that will be implemented, some are suspension bridges, others are motor able bridges. So hopefully in the next 3 or 4 years you will see the connectivity between far western of Nepal and the state of Uttarakhand and the Northern state of India will be much better. So I would suggest those of you involved in tourism promotion in that area, please look at opportunity and prepare the ground for 2/3/4 of years from now."

Focusing on the issues and developments His Excellency Ambassador Rae said "In terms of overland connectivity, reference was made to the Bus Services. I am told that these are doing quite well, Kathmandu-Varanasi bus service are very popular with foreign tourists. So lot of foreign tourists that come to Nepal actually they use this bus to go to Kashi Vishwonath and I am also very happy to inform you that there are lot of mutual interest in starting additional bus services between different points in Nepal and different points in India. So I think the New Motor

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Vehicle Agreement that we have signed has been quite successful, it takes 36 hours from Kathmandu to Delhi and that is enormously long. So I think that infrastructure certainly needs to be improved and facilitation across the border. So these are the issues that need to be addressed. But in terms of easing cross border traffic I am happy to inform you that the Integrated Check Post in Raxaul and Birgung hopefully will be fully operational in the next couple of months. The Indian side is already operational and I think this will really facilitate movement of cargo and hopefully passenger vehicles as well, the Nepali side has still some work to be done and hopefully that will get done soon. So you know things are certainly improving along the border but clearly much more needs to be done.”

Regarding the Sister City, he said - agreements between various religious sites such as Pashupati Nath, Banaras, Ayodhya, Janakpur, Lumbini, Bodhgaya, have been signed but implement part was slow. However he said he was looking for ideas in terms of what should be done to get greater connect.

Addressing the suggestion from tourism entrepreneur Mr. Bashant Mishra regarding joint promotions of Indian and Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs with joint market tourism packages covering both countries, His Excellency Rae said “it would be very very successful and I think we can do that especially for the Buddhist circuit for instance. So if we market a package involving Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Kushinagar, Sarnath in countries of Buddhist culture I think that would indeed be extremely useful.”

Sharing the idea of another greater religious circuit Guest of Honour Mr. Rae suggested “I went to Janakpur recently and one of the ideas that I had suggested was the development of the Ramayan Circuit, where Janakpur would be integral part. When we are talking about Janakpur and Ayodhya, this could be a sub-regional circuit if we include Sri Lanka in this Circuit. I think there would be a lot of interest in such circuit in India and Nepal as well as faraway places like Indonesia or Thailand because Ramayana is something which is known in Vietnam also, for instance. So while the Buddhist circuits has



got much more prominence, I think we can also look at a developing this Ramayana Circuit which I think holds great promises that would attract large number of people from other parts of the world.”

Regarding Indian Currency related issues, His Excellency said “I think to some extent that has been resolved- at least Indian tourist coming to Nepal can bring upto 25,000 rupees in cash in high denomination notes but the problem is they can’t take

that money back, they have to spend 25,000 in this country. So some headway has been made. There are certain security related issues who is linked to this and need to be addressed.”

Regarding LTC, he said that the Embassy of India has been pushing for its implementation and would write again to their Ministry of Personnel to allow this facility because as large number of Indian Government Servants want to come to Nepal.

**Chief Guest of the program and Secretary at Ministry Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation Prem Kumar Rai** said “In the very moment, I want to recall the Memorandum of Understanding between The Government of Nepal and The Government of Republic of India for bilateral cooperation in the field of tourism signed on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014 which recognized the sectors of and fundamental guidelines for the cooperation in tourism between two countries.”

He further said “Similarly the first meeting of Joint Working Group agreed upon the exchange of information and experience, cooperation in Human Resource Development and Investment in Tourism and Hospitality sectors. Nepal commits the promotion of joint circuits between two countries and twinning the cities between India and Nepal as agreed in the meeting.”

Secretary Mr. Rai said “The tourism sectors of both countries have strong attachment as they share common market and routes and the travelers from different parts of the globe take their destinations of these countries as a common package. Hence, there is a need of cooperation between two countries in this sector.”

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Highlighting the need of bilateral cooperation, Chief Guest Mr. Rai further said "We have to work together to strengthen the cooperation in the field of tourism. Developing better tour packages, improving air connectivity and encouraging low cost carriers are the fields on which we need to work together. To make the cooperation durable and effective, we also need to establish an organizational mechanism. For the discussions in these issues at broader level, Nepal is organizing meeting of Joint Working Group in near future."



Regarding the presentations made, Mr. Rana said "I saw a lot of the recommendations; I think from NICCI's side, if this gathering can determine the top 3 or 5 critical issues which will help solve the problems and increase tourism in Nepal then we could follow up on those issues. If we have a long laundry list of about 20 issues, nothing will get solved."

In the program, before concluding remarks, **President of NICCI Mr. Saurya Rana** presented to the Chief Guest Secretary of Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Mr. Prem Kumar Rai the issues and suggestions for enhancement of bilateral tourism between Nepal and India, prepared by the workshop of stakeholders of tourism sector held on 6th June 2016.

Delivering the vote of thanks, President of NICCI, Mr. Saurya Rana suggested critical quantitative or qualitative market research needs to be undertaken which he felt had not been conducted properly in the past, in order to obtain data such as the accurate number of tourists that come from India, their spending and stay in Nepal and their needs and wants. If there is a perceived gap in demand and supply, an effective strategy cannot be formulated, he said.

Mr. Rana further said, "When we talk about the Buddhist Circuit, etc., the fact is that tourists who come on the Nepal-India circuit, rarely spend a night in Lumbini; they come in from India and go back." He suggested that a special package needs to be developed which ensures that they stay longer and the ball rests squarely in Nepal's court. He also requested the Indian side's assistance in ascertaining the best fit in this regard.



Highlighting the prospects of hydropower energy and tourism as the key sectors for Nepal that also have bilateral mechanisms for periodic discussion and review, he requested the Government of Nepal to follow up on the information requested by Mr. Ashish Sinha so that the Embassy of India could help on those matters. He also suggested the Government of Nepal giving the names of persons to deal with issues on a regular basis, so that we wouldn't require a seminar after one year to assess whether we have made any progress or not.

Concluding his remarks, Mr. Rana extended his vote of thanks to the Secretary of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Mr. Prem Kumar Rai; Ambassador of India, Mr. Ranjit Rae; Deputy Chief of Mission of the Indian Embassy, Mr. Vinay Kumar; Jt. Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Mr. Ghanshyam Upadhyaya; Director General of Tourism Department, Mr. Sudarshan Prasad Dhakal; First Secretary Commerce - Indian Embassy, Mr. Ashish Sinha; Second Secretary Commerce - Indian Embassy, Ms. Mala Narendra; CEO of Nepal Tourism Board, Mr. Deepak Raj Joshi; Managing Director of Nepal Airlines Corporation, Mr. Sugat Ratna Kansakar; Convener of the Tourism Committee at NICCI, Mrs. Shreejana Rana, and all other distinguished guests who were present in the program.

Glimpse of the workshop on enhancing Nepal-India bilateral tourism on 6th June 2016



Glimpse of the formal session on enhancing Nepal-India bilateral tourism on 9th June 2016



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The bus service is a joint initiative of the Modern Era Tours and Travels Pvt. Ltd of Nepal and Uttar Pradesh Parivahan Nigam, Ghaziabad depot, of India. The bus will depart at 9 in the morning from the Pokhara Tourism Buspark and follow a route of Syangja, Waling, Butwal, Sunauli Border, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Delhi and finally Anandabihar.”

The service will be operated under Prithivi Highway Bus Operators Committee. Four buses from both sides will provide the service. “Deluxe AC buses will be operated charging INR 2,200 and NPR Rs 3,520 for the service”.

The new bus service from Pokhara to New Delhi will provide a link between the capital of India and the beautiful city of Pokhara. As lot of people from India visit Pokhara every year, there was a long pending demand from the people to start this route. The start of regular bus service between Pokhara and Delhi will improve connectivity, further enhance people to people contact and further strengthen the multi-dimensional ties between Nepal and India. The

## Pokhara-New Delhi direct bus service launched



Direct bus service from Pokhara to New Delhi in India has started from Monday 11th July 2016. Home minister Shakti Bahadur Basnet from Government of Nepal and Ambassador of India to Nepal Ranjit Rae jointly inaugurated the first ceremonial bus service between Pokhara and New Delhi at a special function organized in the Pokhara Lake City on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

bus service will also have an extremely positive impact on the tourism industry of Nepal, particularly in Pokhara region.

The Motor Vehicle Agreement was signed between the Government of India and Government of Nepal during the visit of Rt. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal in November, 2014. After the signing of the agreement regular buses were being plied from Kathmandu-New Delhi, Kathmandu-Varanasi and Mahendranagar-Delhi and vice versa. These services have been very well received by the people of Nepal and India. As per the decision made in the Motor Vehicle Agreement a new bus service between Pokhara and New Delhi was proposed by the Uttar Pradesh State Road transport Corporation (UPSRTC). Accordingly, a team of officers from UPSRTC visited Nepal in the month of May, 2016 for discussing and finalizing the modalities of the proposed bus service between Pokhara and Delhi and subsequently a formal agreement between UPSRTC and M/s. Modern Era Tours and Travels, Nepal was signed in June, 2016 to start the bus service.

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