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Press Release

Kerala to transform Responsible Tourism into people's movement: Minister Riyas



- **First-ever Global Responsible Tourism Summit begins in Kumarakom**

Kottayam, Feb. 26: Kerala will go for timely alterations in its Responsible Tourism (RT) policy to make the activities more people-centric so as to further strengthen the state's travel and tourism industry, Tourism Minister Shri P.A. Mohamed Riyas said today.

Expert suggestions to accomplish this aim will be central to the first-ever Global Responsible Tourism Summit, he said, inaugurating the four-day event at Kumarakom near this city.

The government's RT Mission will spread its activities to entire Kerala by introducing responsible tourism practices in all tourist accommodation units across the state. "We must showcase our Responsible, Experiential, Rural and Sustainable Tourism initiatives so as to increase tourist inflow," he noted at the ceremony chaired by Minister for Cooperation & Registration Shri V.N. Vasavan.

Emphasizing that Kerala's tourism activities should be eco-friendly, Shri Riyas said the four-day summit is set to work towards measures that will empower women in the state.

The conclave will discuss RT models of international repute and work towards a global network in sustainable tourism, he noted in his video address at the opening ceremony that saw Kerala



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Tourism exchanging a memorandum of understanding with the UN Women's Office in India to adopt women-friendly measures that will strengthen sustainable tourism.

Pointing out that Kerala has already decided to convert RT Mission as a Society for the smooth functioning of the initiative, Shri Riyas said the government has decided to revise its 2008 Declaration on RT and scale up its environment-friendly activities across the state.

"We want to ensure Resilient Tourism activities across the state and create a network of practitioners and promoters of Global RT. We need to gain more knowledge from RT practices across the globe, for which we are considering the formation of a global-level association," he noted. "Strengthening RT is going to bring a drastic change in our tourism industry and raise the state's tourism to a new height."

The RT Mission is marching towards establishing 100 per cent structured Responsible Tourism destinations through endeavours such as STREET (Sustainable, Tangible Responsible Experiential Ethnic Tourism) and PEPPER (People's participation for Participatory Planning and Empowerment through Responsible Tourism) that have won global recognition, Shri Riyas added.

Minister Shri Vasavan, in his speech to the 280 delegates, highlighted the need for coordinated efforts to ensure the success of RT. "Initially, in 2007, when RT was mooted, the idea received poor response. There was even resistance from certain quarters," he recalled. "Slowly we won the confidence of the people and RT won public acceptance. We still have a long way to go."

Shri Thomas Chazhikadan, MP, who was Chief Guest at the function, said the Centre's inclusion of two more of Kerala's tourism destinations (Kumarakom and Beypore near Kozhikode) earlier this year in the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme will add power to Kerala's RT Mission. "Ours is a state of letters, latex and lakes," he noted, noting Kerala's variety of tourist resources.

UN Women India Representative Ms Susan Ferguson said encouraging women to work in tourism can instill a sense of security among the travellers to the state. "Women should not be confined to backstage jobs such as cleaning or sewing. They should be more visible as drivers and managers," she noted.

Responsible Tourism Partnership & ICRT International Founder Dr Harold Goodwin said strong RT policies required continuity in governance. "Businesses may try to shirk their responsibility; the administration must woo them into meeting it. Local communities should benefit much more from tourism," he noted. "RT is essentially a social movement, and not a business venture."

Kerala Tourism Principal Secretary Shri K.S. Srinivas, welcoming the gathering at Lakesong resort which is hosting the summit featuring 70 speakers, said RT has been the state's USP in



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tourism beyond its nature and hospitality. "Earlier we looked for examples from other places; today the world is looking at Kerala for good tourism models," he added.

Additional Chief Secretary Dr Venu V. gave a video presentation of the state's RT Mission. Kerala Tourism Director Shri P.B. Nooh presented a report on RT. Kottayam District Collector Dr P.K. Jayasree released the brochure of the February 25-28 summit.

RT Mission State Coordinator Shri K. Rupeshkumar proposed thanks. Other speakers included District Panchayat President Smt K.V. Bindu, Ettumanoor Block Panchayat President Smt Arya Rajan, Ward member Shri P.K. Manoharan, Kerala Travel Mart President Shri Baby Mathew and State Tourism Advisory Council member Shri Abraham George, besides representatives of tourism organisations and people's representatives.

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