

Switzerland targets year-round Indian tourists, ropes in Jemimah Rodrigues as ambassador

BENGALURU, Oct 15 : Switzerland Tourism has appointed Indian cricketer Jemimah Rodrigues as its Friendship Ambassador for India, seeking to attract more Indian visitors during autumn and winter and reduce the concentration of travel between April and June.

India is among Switzerland's top 10 source markets, but Indian visits are heavily concentrated in the April-June period, largely reflecting the country's school holidays and summer travel calendar, Christian Schoch, Director India, Switzerland Tourism, said here on Thursday.

The campaign featuring Rodrigues will promote Switzerland as a year-round destination, showcasing lesser-known locations, seasonal attractions, outdoor adventures and cultural experiences beyond the country's established tourist hotspots.

Switzerland Tourism is seeking to encourage longer stays, promote sustainable travel and distribute visitors more evenly across different regions and seasons. The initiative will cover all four seasons, with a particular focus on attracting Indian travellers during autumn and winter.

Schoch said Switzerland offered a range of experiences beyond the summer months, including autumn foliage, winter landscapes and Christmas markets. The tourism body wants to



broaden the appeal of the destination among younger Indian travellers, whose interests increasingly include independent travel, adventure activities and public transport.

Martin Nydegger, CEO of Switzerland Tourism, said destinations faced intense international competition and could not depend indefinitely on their established popularity.

Everybody knows in tourism the competition is huge. There are always new destinations coming up, so you need to constantly reinvent yourself with campaigns, with interesting stories to tell," he said.

He said destinations needed to keep improving their tourism products and services while developing fresh experiences to attract visitors. The organisation's 'Travel Better' philosophy is built around five priorities: promoting Switzerland throughout the year, showcasing lesser-known destinations alongside popular attractions, encouraging

longer stays, protecting the environment and ensuring that local residents continue to welcome tourists.

Nydegger cited projections of a 40 per cent increase in global travellers over the next decade, underlining the need to manage tourism growth without damaging the natural and cultural assets that attract visitors.

The strategy, he said, was not to discourage travel but to distribute visitors more effectively across destinations and seasons, easing pressure on established hotspots while bringing economic benefits to other regions. Rodrigues, speaking about her association with Switzerland, said the country had long been a dream destination, partly because of its portrayal in Bollywood films. However, she said the actual landscapes were even more vivid than the photographs she had seen.

During her visit, Rodrigues experienced a jet-boat ride, made Swiss chocolates, visited the Bal-

lenberg open-air museum and travelled to Jungfrau-joch, where she experienced snow for the first time.

She also explored Zurich on foot and by e-bike, took an electric boat ride and enjoyed a picnic. She highlighted Switzerland's public transport network as an effective way for visitors to travel between cities and mountain regions while enjoying the scenery.

Rodrigues said Switzerland had experiences for families, groups of friends and solo travellers, beyond its conventional image as a destination primarily for romantic holidays.

Nydegger said his own association with India dated back around three decades, when he undertook an internship at the Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai while studying tourism. He is married to an Indian woman and has a son.

Switzerland Tourism did not announce specific targets for additional Indian arrivals, overnight stays or tourism revenue from the partnership.

The commercial test for the campaign will be whether it can translate Rodrigues' popularity among younger audiences into longer stays and increased demand outside the April-June peak period.

Switzerland Tourism is a federal public-law corporation responsible for promoting the country as a holiday, travel and congress destination.

US start-up plans to sell sunlight at night with help from India's Skyroot Aerospace

WASHINGTON, OCT 16: An American space technology company plans to sell on-demand sunlight at night at precise locations on Earth by placing massive reflecting mirrors in orbit, using launch services from India's Skyroot Aerospace.

California-based Reflect Orbital plans to launch a constellation of satellites to provide on-demand sunlight for services such as illuminating disaster zones for search and rescue operations and extending power generation at solar farms.

The start-up has signed a contract with Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace for two launches onboard its Vikram rockets.

"These launches give us assured schedule and capacity alongside our other planned launches from US sites," Reflect Orbital said in a statement.

"Excited to partner with Reflect Orbital, pioneering one of the most innovative ways to harness space technology to unlock new possibilities here on Earth! Looking forward to launching their vision of sunshine on demand with @SkyrootA rockets," Skyroot Aerospace CEO Pawan Chandana said in a post on X.

In July, the company received approval from the Federal Communications



Commission to construct, launch and operate a demonstration satellite.

The start-up aims to provide on-demand sunlight that can be turned off anytime with adjustable brightness over a five-km swathe.

The company says that on-demand sunlight can help extend work hours in remote industrial zones, aid defence operations by lighting up critical infrastructure, or simply provide "unforgettable experiences" for events in public spaces.

"We're excited to work with a new launch provider, Skyroot, to help ensure access to space," Reflect Orbital

Co-Founder and CEO Ben Nowack said in a statement.

The first launch on this contract will use the Vikram-1 rocket and the second will use Skyroot's in-development Vikram-1U launch vehicle.

The Vikram-1U has additional first-stage boosters and improved performance, the statement said.

"We were recently licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to operate our first spacecraft, and we will continue to work with astronomers, local communities and regulators to earn the right to scale," Nowack said.

In 1993, Russian scientists and engineers deployed a 65-foot mirror into orbit and sent a roving beam of sunlight on Earth. Though successful, the experiment named Znamya was shelved for want of funds.

Reflect Orbital's plans have faced controversy as several environmental organisations have urged the FCC to scrap the permissions granted for the demonstration satellite.

They argue that bright beams of light during the night might disturb wildlife, interfere with astronomy studies and affect circadian rhythms in humans. (PTI)

Reconsider Gautam's appointment as gov till CBI completes Ankita probe, Rahul urges Prez

NEW DELHI, OCT 16: Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday wrote to President Droupadi Murmu to ask the government to reconsider the appointment of Dushyant Gautam as governor till the CBI completes its probe into the Ankita Bhandari murder case.

In his letter to the President, Gandhi said he is writing to her as a "last resort" as she has the right to warn the government and ask it to reconsider the advice to appoint Gautam as governor. Gautam was appointed the governor of Sikkim on Monday.

Gandhi also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of having no regard for women's safety by advising Gautam's appointment as governor.

The parents of Ankita, who protested at India Gate on Wednesday against the appointment, have alleged the involvement of Gautam in the 2022 murder case.

Gandhi had extended his support to the parents by meeting them at India Gate. The Congress leader has said that no criminal proceedings can be instituted or continued against a governor and by appointing Gautam as



governor places him "out of reach" of the CBI, which is probing the case.

"Ankita Bhandari was 19 years old when she was murdered on 18th September 2022. She worked as a receptionist at the Vanantara resort near Rishikesh. Her employer, Pulkit Arya, the son of a BJP leader, pressed her to provide "special services" to VIP guests. She refused. Pulkit Arya and two of his employees killed her. All three are now serving life sentences.

One question has gone unanswered for four years: who were the VIPs? In January this year, after protests across Uttarakhand, the State Government handed that question to the CBI. Its investigation is still underway," he said in his letter to the President.

"I was therefore shocked to learn of the appointment of Mr. Dushyant Gautam as Governor of Sikkim. Many people, including Ankita's family, allege that Mr. Gautam is linked with this crime. The CBI inquiry to determine who the VIPs were is ongoing, but proceeding very slowly," he said.

Gandhi said that the governor is the constitutional head of a state.

"While he holds office, no criminal proceedings can be instituted or continued against him. Mr. Gautam's appointment places him out of the reach of the CBI. An inquiry that can never result in prosecution is an inquiry in name only. A Governor must command the trust of the people of his State. No one under this shadow can.

"I know that Governors are

appointed on the advice of the Council of Ministers, led by the Prime Minister. PM Modi has proved his utter disregard for women's safety by advising Mr. Gautam's appointment. However, by long convention, the President has the right to warn the government, and Article 74(1) gives you the power to ask for advice to be reconsidered. That is why I write to you, as a last resort," Gandhi told the President.

"I request you to ask the Government to reconsider this appointment, and that Mr. Gautam not take office until the CBI has completed its investigation," he said.

Gandhi also claimed in his letter that Ankita had refused the "repellent demand" and paid with her life.

Her parents, who are still fighting for justice, are now protesting this appointment and being detained by police, he said.

"Please act - provide solace to Ankita's grieving parents and protect the high post of Governor," Gandhi said.

Later, in a post on X addressed to President Murmu, Gandhi shared his letter and said that "Ankita refused to compromise her dignity for a VIP, which led to her murder".

KHALTE (NEPAL), OCT 16: When the flood came, Chheku Lama ran uphill, shouting for people to flee. A group followed him, but none survived, he said.

Lama's Khalte village in Nepal's Rasuwa district had been set up as a temporary settlement after a 2015 earthquake destroyed nearby villages. But it offered little protection from floods, with homes clustered along the Trishuli River in a narrow valley.

When the floodwaters surged through on August 26, residents had few routes to escape. At least 375 people were reported missing, according to residents. The village was wiped out.

Nepal is still recovering from the devastating floods that killed more than 1,400 people and left thousands missing in its mountainous border region with China. Another flash flood in north-central Nepal last week left at least five people missing.

Over the past decade, tens of thousands of people in Nepal have been displaced by earthquakes, landslides and floods, only to face new risks in temporary settlements built in vulnerable areas. Khalte's destruction highlights those dangers. Survivors say the government must go beyond emer-

gency relief and temporary shelter to provide safe, permanent places where displaced people can rebuild their lives.

The 2015 earthquake, which killed nearly 9,000 people nationwide, destroyed villages where many families had lived for generations. Under a government relocation plan, about 257 vulnerable households were moved to Khalte, which geological assessments later classified as a "red zone" because of landslide and avalanche risks.

Bam Bahadur Tamang, a Khalte resident now living in a government relief centre, said he and many others had opposed the decision to resettle them there but they were eventually forced to move. He said any new relocation must account for both safety and access to basic services.

"Wherever the government resettles us now, it must first ensure that the place is safe," he said. "We are not cattle to be moved from one place to another."

Tamang's worries point to a challenge that extends beyond finding safe ground. Displaced families also need access to schools, healthcare, roads and livelihoods if a temporary settlement is to become a viable home.

Nepal's government says it plans to build a new city for flood victims, with industries, hospitals and schools, and that displaced residents would not be sent back to settlements destroyed by the flood. It is also considering involving private developers in reconstruction, including a model in which they build homes in cooperation with landowners.

Dharam Raj Uprety, chief executive of Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority, said the government was identifying land for settlements in safe areas. Experts would assess land use, and flood-prone areas could be declared uninhabitable, he said. The government could also convert vulnerable riverbanks into forest land and build homes on safer ground.

Uprety stressed, however, that agencies responsible for infrastructure and urban planning need to coordinate more closely.

"The disaster authority cannot do all of that work itself. Its role is largely to coordinate and create an environment in which other agencies incorporate disaster risk into their planning," he said.

Nepal has previously taken steps to reduce flood risks, including river monitoring, early-warning systems and

community preparedness. But its remote mountain valleys remain at risk of sudden floods caused by landslides and glacial lake outbursts.

Scientists warn that rising temperatures and increasingly unstable mountain landscapes make better monitoring and stronger early-warning systems ever more important for Nepal.

For Khalte's survivors the question of where to rebuild remains unresolved. Many are reluctant to return to places where they lost family members, saying a new relocation plan may do little to reassure them.

Norchi Ghale survived both the 2015 earthquake and the August floods, but suffered devastating losses, losing his father in the earthquake and his mother and wife in the floods.

Before the flood, he owned a small plot of farmland in Khalte, where he raised cattle that provided his family's main source of income. When he recently returned, he could no longer recognise where anything had once stood.

"I could not even trace where things used to be, just like my future now. I don't know where I will go or how I will raise my children," he said. (AP)

Zelenskyy seeks more F-16 jets, ammunition from Belgium

BRUSSELS, OCT 16: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday called for additional F-16 fighter jets and ammunition from Belgium to strengthen Ukraine's air defences as Russian attacks on energy infrastructure left thousands without electricity and disrupted power supplies in parts of Kyiv.

During talks with Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever, Zelenskyy said Russian strikes on energy facilities had left nearly 15,000 people without electricity in the Volyn region, while some districts of Kyiv and the surrounding region were also experiencing power outages.

Zelenskyy said repair crews in some communities were unable to begin restoration work because of the threat of further Russian strikes targeting the same locations.

"F-16s are helping significantly in repelling attacks by jet-powered 'Shaheds'," Zelenskyy said, adding that Ukraine is working with Belgium to secure additional aircraft as quickly as possible. The two leaders also discussed the possibility of supplying more ammunition for the fighter jets.

Zelenskyy separately met Belgium's King Philippe, thanking him, the government and the Belgian people for their continued support. He stressed that strengthening Ukraine's air defences against Russian missile and drone attacks remained a priority.

He also called for frozen Russian assets to remain immobilised throughout the war, saying Moscow should not regain access to funds that could be used to finance further attacks or destabilise Europe.

The Ukrainian president raised



similar concerns during meetings with European Council President Antonio Costa, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, seeking further military and financial assistance.

Following his meeting with the EU leaders, Zelenskyy said Russia has given no indication that it is ready to end the war, pointing instead to continued attacks on Ukrainian cities and critical infrastructure.

He said a Russian strike on Kharkiv on Friday had killed two people and wounded 17 others, while another attack hit a shopping mall in Rivne and energy facilities in four regions.

Zelenskyy called for stronger European support for Ukraine's energy infrastructure and air defences, as well as assistance to maintain the country's

financial resilience into next year.

In talks with Frederiksen, he said Russia appeared to have interpreted signals about easing sanctions as encouragement to continue its war against residential buildings, substations and other infrastructure essential to daily life.

He urged European countries to step up preparations ahead of winter, prioritising air defence systems, particularly those capable of intercepting ballistic missiles and jet-powered drones.

Costa, meanwhile, reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to supporting Ukraine politically, financially and militarily, saying the bloc must maintain its assistance, increase pressure on Russia and advance Ukraine's path towards EU membership. (UNI)