

India signs art and culture agreement with Brunei

India Thursday signed an agreement with oil-rich Brunei, ruled by one of the richest men in the world, to strengthen cooperation in the fields of culture, arts and sports.

The agreement would result in the exchange of students, artists, academics and sports persons.

Tourism and Culture Minister Ambika Soni and Brunei's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Pehin Dato Lim Jock Seng signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) under which a joint consultative committee (JCC) would be constituted for carrying out its provisions.

'We have a good historical relationship with India. We have been investing quite a lot in India but not directly. We are also looking forward to people-to-people contacts. We are working out how to invest in the hotel industry in India,' Seng told reporters here.

'I-T is another area we are keen on to learn from India, which is a world leader,' he added.

Seng is a member of the high-power delegation that is accompanying the Sultan of Brunei, Haji Hassanal Bolkia, on his four-day visit to India. The sultan had Wednesday met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Soni said during this meeting, the prime minister had mentioned closer cooperation, specifically in the hotel industry sector, between the two countries.

Noting there were no direct commercial flights between the two countries, Soni said very few tourists have been able to travel to each other's country. About 586 people travelled from Brunei, which has a population of 383,000, to India in 2006-07.

'Till some years ago, there was a direct flight from Kolkata. We would work towards better connectivity and this would revive tourism between the two countries,' she added.

The agreement is for five years and can be extended for another year.

'The cultural agreement would result in exchange of academics, students and sports persons with each other's country. As they are also interested in Bollywood, we would have to see how we can work that out,' Soni said.

This apart, art and archaeological exhibitions would also travel to each other's countries, she added.

With the tourism ministry pushing for a 'visa on arrival' facility, Brunei would be one of the first countries to be included in the pilot project when the proposal gets the go-ahead from the home ministry, Soni said.

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