

NRIs eager to set up hospitals, hotels in India: Soni

Foreign investors, especially non resident Indians, are keen to set up hospitals and budget hotels in India to give a fillip to medical tourism in the country, Tourism and Culture Minister Ambika Soni said Tuesday.

'Foreign investors, mainly NRIs, are interested in setting up hospitals with at least 500 beds across the country. They have also expressed eagerness to set up budget hotels,' Soni said.

'Three international parties have evinced interest in setting up 1,000-bed facilities in the national capital region (NCR).'

'They will meet the government by the end of this year. They are also keen to set up budget accommodation facilities for patients,' Soni said, adding that India needs 150,000 hotel rooms by 2010.

'There is \$6.5 billion investment in the pipeline for medical tourism. Of the 150,000 hotel rooms, 100,000 budget rooms and 50,000 star accommodation rooms are coming up,' she said, addressing the fourth India Health Summit organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Commenting on problems faced by the medical tourism industry, Soni said the biggest deterrent for foreign investors was the 'unavailability of a single window clearance system'.

'I am in touch with Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss and other cabinet colleagues and working towards a system in which investing in India becomes easier.'

Soni said hospitals in India need to be transparent and keep their legal experts ready to face any legal battle involving patients and doctors.

'Since a lot of overseas patients are coming, it's very natural that all may not be very satisfied with the treatment. But we need to keep the things transparent and have a proper legal framework to deal with the eventuality,' the minister said.

Prathap Reddy, chairman Apollo Hospitals Group, addressing the summit said the world has recognised the potential of India as a medical tourism hub.

He stressed the need for increasing the nursing capability to tackle crisis like shortage in staff and urged the government to increase the numbers of nurses from the existing four million to 30 million.

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