

## 2nd SCO Tourism Expert Working Group under India's Presidency begins at Kashi (Varanasi) today

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The 2 day second meeting of tourism Expert Working Group began in Kashi (Varanasi) today. India as the President of SCO for the year 2023, is chairing the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of tourism Expert Working Group 14-15 March 2023 in 'Kashi' (Varanasi). The meeting of 1st Expert Working Group under India's SCO presidency was held on 31 January 2023.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization comprising eight Member States China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, four Observer States and six "Dialogue Partners"

The second meeting of EWG discussed the Joint Action Plan for implementing the Agreement between the Governments of the SCO Member States on the Development of Cooperation in Tourism. The Experts from all member countries of SCO prioritised various activities under areas of cooperation such as *Promotion of the SCO tourism brand, Promotion of the cultural heritage of the SCO Member States in tourism, Sharing and Exchange of information and digital technology in tourism, Promotion of mutual cooperation in medical and health tourism, Improving the quality of services.*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the EWG Chaired by Mr Rakesh Kumar Verma Additional Secretary of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India was attended by senior officials from tourism ministries and departments of tourism from the SCO member countries, representatives from secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India.

This Action Plan prepared by Experts after thorough deliberations and inputs by all SCO member countries will be finalised during the SCO Tourism Ministers Meeting (TMM). The Tourism Ministers Meeting, which is to be held on 17-18 March 2023 in Varanasi will conclude the Working Group meetings on tourism track under India's SCO presidency.

'Kashi' (Varanasi) where the tourism related meeting of the SCO countries were held under India's presidency, has been designated as the first cultural capital of SCO region. This initiative is aimed to highlight and showcase the cultural wealth of SCO region and to recognize the value of culture as a resource for socio economic development for the region.

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