

Speech by Commissioner for Tourism at the opening ceremony of the "Hong Kong Fair" in Mumbai, India (English only)

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Following is the speech by the Commissioner for Tourism, Ms Margaret Fong, at the opening ceremony of the "Hong Kong Fair" in Mumbai, India today (October 2):

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be in Mumbai, this vibrant and cosmopolitan Indian metropolis.

As a first-time visitor to this magnificent country, I am struck by the millennia-old cultural heritage that is crystallised by the very warm hospitality of the people, the architectural legacy, the exotic cuisines, the cinematic excellence and of course the passion for cricket. Undoubtedly, all these make Mumbai and your country favourite destinations for travellers from all over the world, Hong Kong including.

The ties between India and Hong Kong are long and strong and dated back to the 19th century. Since the early days, Indian merchants have been active contributors to Hong Kong's development.

Our world-renowned ferry service between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island, the Star Ferry, which commands breathtaking views of the beautiful Victoria Harbour, traces its origins back to an Indian entrepreneur by the name of Dorabjee Naorojee Mithaiwala. On your next visit to Hong Kong, I urge you all to take a ride on this must-see attraction, rated the number one ferry ride in the world by the Society of American Travel Writers earlier this year.

Today, Hong Kong has a large and well-established Indian community numbering some 35,000. For generations, Indians

have made significant contributions to Hong Kong in the fields of public service, legal, business, tourism and other professional areas.

One logical result of these close historical ties between India and Hong Kong is strong bilateral visitor traffic. Last year, we welcomed some 350,000 visitors from India, an increase of 10% over 2007. I believe the opportunities for bilateral tourism are abundant. This is why I am here today.

Just like Mumbai, Hong Kong is one of the most glamorous and happening cities in Asia. Our Chinese heritage combined with British influences gave birth to a unique blend of Eastern and Western cultures. Hence, Hong Kong offers an experience like no other.

As a well-known "shoppers' paradise" and the gastronomic centre of Asia, the huge variety of retail products and rich diversity of restaurants plus the absence of sales tax will be able to satisfy the whims of the most discriminating palate and taste; and at the same time offer a good bargain and delectable local delicacies to meet every budget. Last year, we went a step further and abolished the wine duty, making us the first duty-free wine port amongst major economies. Hong Kong was also chosen as one of the few Asian cities to be featured by the Michelin Guide. If this is not enough to tempt you, more attractions are in store.

The Hong Kong government is fully committed to fostering the development of the tourism industry. Over the next five years, public and private investment in tourism infrastructure will exceed 100 billion Indian rupees. Apart from expanding our two flagship theme parks, the Hong Kong Disneyland and Ocean Park, we will also develop a new world-class cruise terminal capable of berthing two of the world's largest cruise vessels at the same time. And with the world's top cruise lines represented in Hong Kong, I encourage you to start planning your next cruise vacation

which sets sail from Hong Kong.

As an international commercial centre, Hong Kong maintains close ties with the rest of the world. To support our business operation, we offer state-of-the-art convention and exhibition facilities complemented by world-class services to ensure that our MICE (Meetings, Incentive Travels, Conventions and Exhibitions) organisers and visitors enjoy the best of the best.

This year, some 300 international conventions and exhibitions will take place in Hong Kong, including the Asian Aerospace International Expo 2009 and Mobile Asia Congress 2009.

Location-wise, Hong Kong sits at the heart of the Pearl River Delta, the fastest growing region and the manufacturing hub of Mainland China. From Hong Kong, you can reach half the world's population within five hours of flight. That is why Hong Kong has built a reputation as a global sourcing hub. We are delighted that the Indian Sourcing Fair for home products has decided to be held in Hong Kong twice this year, the first one in April and the next one in late October (20th-23rd). We look forward to welcoming many more such exhibitions from India in future.

But there are yet more reasons why you should visit Hong Kong. As the events capital in Asia, we offer exciting and attractive sports and culture events which make every day a unique experience for our visitors. Last year, we have successfully hosted the Equestrian Events of the 2008 Olympic Games. In December this year, we will host the East Asian Games.

Every year, world famous sports events such as the Cathay Pacific Rugby Sevens, the Standard Chartered Marathon and the Hong Kong International Cricket Sixes are held in our city. India has always been a strong contender in our Cricket

Sixes, and we look forward to welcoming you back in late October.

Ladies and gentlemen, both Mumbai and Hong Kong are successful trading and financial hubs, defined by its cosmopolitan character, openness, efficiency, flexibility and convenience in doing business.

Not surprisingly, these are also the same attributes that guarantee a visitor-friendly environment. For our friends from India, you will feel comfortable navigating round Hong Kong, where English is an official language, where Indian restaurants and Indian television channels are plentiful, and where the local Indian community is vibrant and dynamic. With more than 40 direct flights each week between India and Hong Kong, and the visa-free arrangement for nationals from India to visit our city, there is every reason to make Hong Kong your next destination for business and vacation travel.

At today's fair you will find that Hong Kong has something to offer for everyone. Our travel trade are eager to share with you the many business opportunities that abound. The potential for tourism collaboration between us is immense.

I urge you all to come and experience for yourselves what Hong Kong is all about. If you can't make it for the Cricket Sixes which will be held from October 31 to November 1, come during the winter festivities or our Chinese New Year in mid-February 2010. And remember to bring your families and friends along. I promise you a memorable and magical experience.

Thank you and enjoy the fair.

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