

Tourism only way to overcome poverty in Sri Lanka: Kishu

■ By Nishel Fernando

Tourism is the only way to overcome extreme poverty in Sri Lanka where 40 percent of the population is unable to afford three decent meals a day, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) Chairman Kishu Gomes said.

"There's extreme poverty in our country. People are dying

of starvation in our country. As per my estimate, 40 percent of the population can't afford to have three decent meals a day and 20 percent of the population can't afford to have one proper decent meal a day," he elaborated.

Gomes stressed that tourism is the only way to eradicate the poverty in the country.

"The only industry this country can depend on is tourism. Expatriate remittances have been declining sharply over past three years, and the apparel sector is not faring well due to competition. Without tourism, there's no way our economy can survive," he stressed.

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From left: Acting Malaysian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Ismail Mohamed Bkri, Indonesian Ambassadors to Sri Lanka Gusti Ngurah Ardiyasa, Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce First Vice Chairperson Chathuri Ranasinghe, ARTDO President Janaprieth Fernando, SLTPB Chairman Kishu Gomes and CIMA International Board Member Shehan Peiris

Tourism only...

Contradicting the official tourism sector employment figures of the government, he emphasised that over two million Sri Lankans are either directly or indirectly employed in the sector. Official statistics indicate that little over 400,000 Sri Lankans are directly or indirectly employed in the sector.

"Central Bank was saying direct and indirect employment from tourism is 400,000. The moment tourism industry hit the crisis, we saw the number of people who got negatively impacted and I am personally aware that the employment numbers is a couple of millions, not the 400,000 claimed by the Central Bank," he said.

Gomes pointed out that tourism has the potential of becoming a US \$10 billion industry over the years, becoming the top foreign exchange generator for the country, and noted that 15 percent year-on-year growth is required to reach that.

"Given that tourism has to be the number one revenue generator for the country, it's everyone's responsibility to do something to contribute to industry's growth, at least with a smile. We need to create a conducive environment for tourists visiting the country."

PIC BY PRADEEP DILRUCKSHANA