

TITLE : Looking forward to the Commonwealth Games

INTRODUCTION

The next Commonwealth Games are going to be held in 2010 in New Delhi, the capital of our country. This session aims at preparing students to be good hosts and volunteers during the Games. It aims at enhancing life skills such as Self Awareness, Creative and Critical Thinking, Empathy, Effective Communication and improving Inter-Personal Relationships with people from other countries.

1. Objectives : By the end of the session, the students will be able to



- Become aware about the Commonwealth and Commonwealth Games.
- Become aware about the importance of events such as the Commonwealth Games.
- Understand the importance of extending warmth, hospitality and cooperation to the guests from other countries who visit Delhi in relation with the Games.

2. Time : 70 Minutes
(Two continuous periods)

3. Life Skills Being Used : Effective Communication, Decision Making, Empathy, Problem Solving, Critical Thinking

4. Advance Preparations : None

5. Linkages : Please see Contents

6. Methodology : Group Discussion, Role play



7. Process :

Step 1:

Please read the Fact Sheet carefully, and go through this session well in advance before you carry it out with the students.

Step 2:

Greet the class and state that we all know that Delhi is going to host the Commonwealth Games in 2010. All agencies are working fulltime to prepare for the Games. The roads are being widened, and venues for the games are being spruced up. A whole new setup for the stay of the athletes –the “Commonwealth Games Village” - is coming up near the Akshardham temple. The Education department will play a crucial role in the Games and today we will discuss how we can contribute to the success of the Games.



Step 3:

State that the countries which were ruled by the British Empire, and have now become free and independent, are part of the Commonwealth Nations. The unique characteristics of the Commonwealth Games include being the only Games which **share a common language**. All athletes and officials can converse with each other in English, creating an atmosphere that has led to the Commonwealth Games being known as the "Friendly Games".

Ask a group of students to perform the role play for the situation given below situation. State that all **conversations in the role play have to be carried out in simple English**, for the reason that- as stated above -English is the common link between the countries that belong to the Commonwealth. It will also give us a chance to brush up our spoken English and the confidence that we too can converse with and help our foreign guests.

You can ask the students to use the following dialogue as a sample for starting the

Role Play:

Rahim is a class XI student in a government school. He has been selected as a volunteer for the Commonwealth Games. He qualified after going through various interviews. He, along with some more volunteers, is posted at Delhi’s International Airport to welcome the guests and assist them. He has been given an attractive dress, cap and a badge with his name and photo on it. He and his friends have been allocated a counter in the arrival lobby, and they are very excited.

Rahim spots a foreign guest coming towards the counter. Rahim states his name, greets him, and asks how he can help the guest. The guest wants to know where he can collect his baggage from. Rahim volunteers to take the guest to the baggage area, all the while making pleasant conversation with him. Before parting, Rahim wishes him a pleasant stay in Delhi and in India. The guest thanks him warmly.

conversation. Encourage the students to be spontaneous and use simple English.

Dialogue between Rahim and the Foreign Guest (FG):

Rahim: (walking towards the FG) - Good Morning!
 FG- Good morning!

Rahim: My name is Rahim. I am a Games Volunteer. Can I help you?

FG- Oh! Thank you for offering to help me. Can you please tell me where I can collect my baggage?

Rahim: Of course! Let me take you there.

FG: Thank you so much! You are very helpful! I am so happy to meet you.



Rahim: (on the way to the baggage area) – I am from Delhi. Where are you from?

FG: I am from Australia – from the city of Melbourne.

Rahim: Oh I see! That’s where the previous Commonwealth Games were held in 2006. Here is the baggage area. I hope you have a pleasant stay in Delhi and India.

FG: Thank you so much!

Step 4:

Applaud the role play. Ask the students : **“Why did the Foreign Guest feel relaxed and happy?”**

Expected Responses:

- The guest felt happy because he was attended to by a polite and helpful volunteer, Rahim’s friendly way of dealing made the guest feel relaxed, the offer to take the guest to the baggage area made the guest happy, Rahim’s continuing the dialogue with the guest made him feel relaxed.

Note for Teachers:

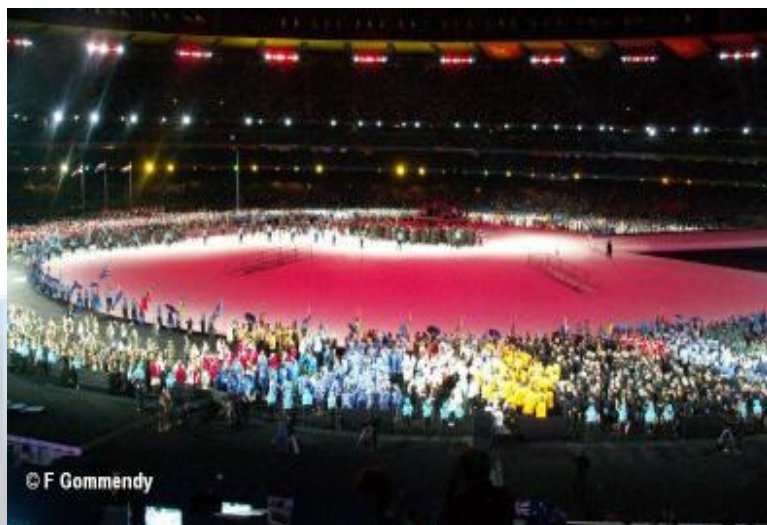
State that a volunteer in an international games event is there to help a foreign guest for many things. It could be, as shown in the role play, to reach the baggage collection point, or something else like changing money to Indian currency or finding a telephone booth to make an international call. We can all be of help to our foreign guests. Reiterate that as English is the link language, it is best that we start practicing spoken English. We must constantly work to improve our communication skills and that’s where our YUVA sessions will help us. We will not only stand a good chance of being selected as a volunteer for these prestigious games, but also better our chances of getting jobs later on where the ability to speak English is a necessity.

Step 5:

State that now we will have a quiz on the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Games. Divide the class into two teams by allocating the rows of desks to the particular team. State that each team will get 5 points for the correct answer but no points for incorrect answers. The unanswered or incorrectly answered questions will be passed on to the other team.

Questions for the Quiz:-

- How many countries are members of the Commonwealth? (Ans: 53 countries)
- Name any five countries that are members of Commonwealth? (See the list in the Fact Sheet)
- How often are the 'Commonwealth Games' held? (Every four years)
- Name any three countries that have hosted the Commonwealth Games till now? (See the list in the Fact Sheet)
- When and where were the first Commonwealth Games held? (In 1930, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)
- When and where were they last held? (In 2006, Melbourne – Australia)
- Where will they be held next in 2014? (Ans: Glasgow -Scotland)
- Delhi is the second Asian city to hold the games. Which was the first Asian city to hold the Commonwealth Games? (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was the first. in 1998).
- Name any five sports or games competitions that will be held during the Commonwealth Games? (See the list in the Fact Sheet)
- What was India's overall position in the Melbourne games? (India was fourth in the overall medals position)



Step 6:

Applaud the good work done and declare the winner. Share some details about the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth games by referring to the Fact Sheet. Encourage the students to ask some questions. Explain that sports and games are important in our life and help us to maintain a balance between the body and the mind.

Step 7:

Ask another group of students to carry out the role play given below in simple English. Ask the class to watch it carefully. (Note: you may add to the questions that have been given in the scenario below.)



Role play Scenario

Anita is a student in class XII in a government school. She has been selected as a volunteer for the Commonwealth games and is on duty at the national stadium. During the athletics events a foreign guest comes over to her counter and seeks Anita's help to go sight seeing. He asks Anita about the historical places of interest other than Akshardham and India Gate as he has already seen them. Anita tells him about some places like Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Qutab Minar, Lotus temple, Humayun's tomb, Nicholson's cemetery, Janpath and Sarojini Nagar Market for shopping. The guest asks her questions like – “How far is Jama Masjid from Red Fort?”, “Who made the Red Fort?”, “Can I get some public transport to Janpath?”, “Where can I attend some music and cultural programs?” “From which station does the Taj Express for Agra depart”? Etc. Anita refers to a manual and provides the guest with the required information. The guest before going out thanks Anita for all her help.

Step 8:

Applaud the presentation. Now ask the class “What did we learn from the role play?” “In your opinion was Anita able to give all the right answers?”

Expected Responses:

- We learnt that we must have accurate knowledge about the important places in Delhi, we learnt how useful our YUVA excursions to historical places have been, we learnt that we too must visit these places and learn more about them, Yes, Anita gave good answers, No she needs to prepare more, she needs to have accurate information, Anita provided general information, etc

Note for Teachers:

Applaud the answers. State that of course we all do know something about our city and some students know more than others. The excursion programs under YUVA have been designed to help students get first hand information. But we are all required to be better prepared. Students must observe carefully all details the next time they are taken for excursion. They should also read up and procure more information about places of historical and cultural interest in and around Delhi. Now provide the answers – Jama Masjid is less than 1 km from the Red Fort, Shahjahan built the Red Fort, Yes you can either take the Metro or the public bus for Janpath, for cultural and Music programs you can go to Siri Fort auditorium, Triveni Kala sangam or Kamani auditorium, the “Taj Express” leaves from Nizamuddin station..

Step 9:

Ask the same group to redo the above role play and to utilize the answers given. Ask them to speak in simple English. Ask the class to note the improvement! That's the magic of having specific information.

Now ask the students-

- “Would you –if given a chance - like to be a Games volunteer?”
- “How do we have to prepare



ourselves if we have to be a volunteer for the games?”

- “What are the qualities required to become a good volunteer?”

Expected Responses:

- Yes we would like to be a volunteer.
- We must learn to speak clear and simple English, we must be confident, we must be helpful, we must learn how to behave with foreigners, we must have knowledge about the subject, say airport baggage area and other important and needed information, we should know about our city, to be a good volunteer a person must be helpful, pleasant, knowledgeable, able to communicate well in English, be confident.

Note for Teachers:

Applaud the answers. Tell them that occasions such as the Commonwealth Games provide lots of opportunities to young students to use their skills of effective communication, empathy, reaching out to others and problem solving. They, in the process, learn about people and their countries. There could be many kinds of jobs that students can volunteer for: - helpers during events, opening, closing ceremonies, interpreters, as guides, running assistance booths, traffic control, crowd management, lost and found etc. Explain to the students that they are all stakeholders and hosts of this major event, as it is being held in their city.

State that to be a good volunteer the person should be knowledgeable about Delhi, have some knowledge about the participating countries, be confident and be able to communicate in English.

Reinforce that it is our responsibility to look after all these people coming to India from various countries. We need to use life skills of Empathy, Effective Communication, Coping with Emotions and Decision making in doing so.

Step 6:

Now ask **each** student to collect information about any one commonwealth country – like eg.-

South Africa, Canada, Bangladesh etc. Ask the students to make simple charts with photographs and put them up in the class. (Refer to fact sheet for the list of countries).



Note for Teachers:

Let the students refer to magazines, G.K. Books, Encyclopedia, Internet and collect information on the participating countries about their language, currency, flag, sports, capital, population, food, culture, dress, National Day, National Animal, National Bird, language, famous places, climate, history etc, of the country. You too can collect the information and put it in a file, which should remain in the classroom or library (whichever is convenient) so that others can refer to it and enhance their knowledge about different countries, and acquire skills, which could help them in getting a job.

Key Messages:

Highlight and recap the following to the class:

- Each one of us needs to learn to value our guests as per tradition of our country.
- Develop the manners, behavior, etiquettes to behave with the guest to project a positive image of our country in view of the motto “Atithi Devo Bhav” (a guest is like a God).
- Learn to communicate in English as it is the universally spoken language of all the Commonwealth countries.
- Learn about different countries and their culture.
- Learn other foreign languages.

Ideas for Learning More:

- Conduct a quiz on ‘Commonwealth countries and games.’
- Carry out project work on ‘Commonwealth Games’
- Collect ‘newspaper clippings’ about your favourite sports or any sports you like.
- Collect flags, currencies, languages etc of other countries, develop it as a hobby.
- Try to locate all member countries of the Commonwealth Games on a world map.

Note for Teachers:

You should follow up the students who are serious about becoming volunteers after three months. Check their progress with regard to i) learning of English ii) learning appropriate etiquette iii) knowledge about Commonwealth iv) other relevant areas. The volunteer program will be sponsored by the Delhi Government and will be launched soon. For further details kindly refer to the website- www.cwgdelhi2010.com

FACT SHEET

Commonwealth Games 2010

The city of New Delhi, home to 13.8 million people, will host the Commonwealth Games in 2010. Mrs. Sheila Dixit, the Chief Minister of the National Capital Territory of Delhi—the host city for the next Games—received the **flag of Commonwealth Games 2010** at the closing ceremony of 2006 Melbourne Games. This will be the first time India will host the Games and only the second time the event will be held in Asia (**Kuala Lumpur was the first in 1998**).



The Commonwealth, Some Facts

- The Commonwealth is an association of 53 independent countries.
- The Head of the Commonwealth is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
- Headquarters are at Marlborough House in London.
- 1.7 billion people are in the Commonwealth (29.8% of the world's population).
- About half of this population are less than 25 years old.
- The member with the biggest population is India (at one billion) and the smallest are Nauru and Tuvalu in the Pacific region (with 11,000 people each).
- Commonwealth countries work together to make their economies stronger, to improve their systems of government and to improve the skills of their people.
- The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) takes place every two years.

Commonwealth countries:

There are 53 countries of the Commonwealth, of which 46 are currently Commonwealth Foundation members.

Membership to the Foundation is voluntary, and is open to all Commonwealth governments. Associated states or overseas territories of member governments of the Foundation can apply for associate membership.



| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Antigua and Barbuda | Mozambique |
| Australia | Namibia |
| The Bahamas | <i>Nauru</i> |
| <i>Bangladesh</i> | New Zealand |
| Barbados | Nigeria |
| Belize | <i>Pakistan</i> |
| Botswana | Papua New Guinea |
| Brunei Darussalam | <i>St Kitts and Nevis</i> |
| Cameroon | St Lucia |
| Canada | St Vincent and the Grenadines |
| Cyprus | Samoa |
| Dominica | Seychelles |
| <i>Fiji Islands</i> | Sierra Leone |
| The Gambia | Singapore |
| Ghana | Solomon Islands |
| Grenada | South Africa |
| Guyana | Sri Lanka |
| India | Swaziland |
| Jamaica | Tonga |
| Kenya | Trinidad and Tobago |
| Kiribati | <i>Tuvalu</i> |
| Lesotho | Uganda |
| Malawi | United Kingdom |
| Malaysia | United Republic of Tanzania |
| <i>Maldives</i> | <i>Vanuatu</i> |
| Malta | Zambia |
| Mauritius | |

(Italics indicate countries which are not currently members of the Commonwealth Foundation.)

The History of Commonwealth Games :

A sporting competition bringing together the members of the British Empire was first proposed by Reverend Astley Cooper in 1891 when he suggested a *“Pan – Britannic –Pan-Anglican Contest and Festival every four years as a means to increasing the goodwill and good understanding of the British Empire”* The first Commonwealth Games were held in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Eleven countries with 400 athletes in total participated in the first Commonwealth Games. \$30,000 was provided by the City of Hamilton to these nations to help cover travelling costs. Since then, the Games have been conducted every four years except for 1942 and 1946, due to World War II. From 1930 to 1950 the Games were known as the British Empire Games, then the British Empire and Commonwealth Games until 1962. From 1966 to 1974 they took on the title of British Commonwealth Games and from 1978 onwards they have been known as simply the Commonwealth Games. **Unique characteristics of the Commonwealth Games include being the only Games which shares a**



common language. All athletes and officials can converse with each other in English, creating an atmosphere that has led to the Commonwealth Games being long known as the "Friendly Games".

| Commonwealth Games | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------|------------------|----------|
| Year | Host City / Country | Participating Countries | Sports | Events Contested | Athletes |
| 1930 | Hamilton, Canada | 11 | 6 | 59 | 400 |
| 1934 | London, England | 16 | 6 | 68 | 500 |
| 1938 | Sydney, Australia | 15 | 7 | 71 | 464 |
| 1950 | Auckland, New Zealand | 12 | 9 | 88 | 590 |
| 1954 | Vancouver, Canada | 24 | 9 | 91 | 662 |
| 1958 | Cardiff, Wales | 35 | 9 | 94 | 1122 |
| 1962 | Perth, Australia | 35 | 9 | 104 | 863 |
| 1966 | Kingston, Jamaica | 34 | 9 | 110 | 1050 |
| 1970 | Edinburgh, Scotland | 42 | 9 | 121 | 1383 |
| 1974 | Christchurch, New Zealand | 38 | 9 | 121 | 1276 |
| 1978 | Edmonton, Canada | 46 | 10 | 128 | 1474 |
| 1982 | Brisbane, Australia | 46 | 10 | 142 | 1583 |
| 1986 | Edinburgh, Scotland | 26 | 10 | 163 | 1662 |
| 1990 | Auckland, New Zealand | 55 | 10 | 204 | 2073 |
| 1994 | Victoria, Canada | 63 | 10 | 217 | 2557 |
| 1998 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | 70 | 15 | 213 | 3633 |
| 2002 | Manchester, England | 72 | 17 | 281 | 3679 |
| 2006 | Melbourne, Australia | 71 | 16 | 245 | 4049 |
| 2010 | Delhi, India | 71 | 17 | | |

2006 Commonwealth Games

The Australian city of Melbourne, successfully hosted the XVIII Commonwealth Games between the 15th and 26th March 2006. For the first time in the history of the Games the Queen's Baton visited every single Commonwealth nation and territory taking part in the Games, a journey of 180,000 kms (112,500 miles). The relay ended when the Governor of Victoria, and former Commonwealth Games medallist, John Landy delivered the baton to Her Majesty the Queen at the Melbourne Cricket Ground during the opening ceremony. The sports on the programme were Aquatics (diving, swimming & synchronised swimming), Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Bowls, Boxing, Cycling, Gymnastics, Hockey, Netball, Rugby 7s, Shooting, Squash, Table Tennis, Triathlon and Weightlifting. There were approximately 5,766 athletes and team officials in attendance in Melbourne with the home nation having the largest team with 535 athletes and officials and the volcanic island of Montserrat the smallest with 4 members.



2010 Games, Delhi :

The dates for the Games are 3rd – 14th October 2010, inclusive of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. The Delhi Games Village is to be constructed as a low rise medium development on a 40 acre site in the heart of the capital with a possible capacity for 8,500 athletes and officials. Existing and new stadium will be used to host **the following sports:** Archery, Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Boxing, Cycling, Elite Athletes with a Disability (EAD) Events, Gymnastics, Hockey, Lawn Bowls, Netball, Rugby, Shooting, Squash, Table Tennis, Tennis, Weightlifting and Wrestling.

Mr. Suresh Kalmadi, is the Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Commonwealth Games 2010. Mr. Kalmadi while speaking at a workshop organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said that in Melbourne, India finished fourth in the overall medal tally and are aiming for second position in 2010 games.

Facilities being made available at Delhi -

The National Stadium, which has been one of the main centres for hockey, will see a new turf soon for the 2010 Commonwealth Games. **The Dhyan Chand National Stadium**, as it is called, will see several other changes. Installation of floodlights at the stadium is already under way while both the artificial turfs will be re-laid. In addition, a third turf



Delhi

2010 Commonwealth Games

will be laid at the present grass grounds. But the major changes will be in the actual structure of the stadium itself. The main playing area will be shifted about 20 feet, bringing it closer to the stands, the seating area at the far end will also be moved forward. It will raise the capacity to about 25,000.

The **Nehru Stadium**, which will host the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, will undergo the most renovation in the coming months. Work includes partial covering of the stadium and also the spectator gallery will move closer to the action. A new athletics track will also be laid, and that will be one of the big boons for the upcoming athletes after the Games. Separate accommodation and technical rooms will be built. The warm-up area behind the stadium will also be upgraded to accommodate a special arena for throwing events.

The Indira Gandhi Stadium will host competitions in four disciplines - cycling, archery, wrestling and gymnastics. The stadium which came as part of the 1982 Asian Games will see big changes, including a brand new track for cycling.

A new indoor hall will also be built while electronic video -matrix scoreboards with quick replay facilities will be put up. Multi -purpose AC Indoor Hall at Thyagaraj Complex. **The Thyagaraj Complex** situated near the Safdarjung Airport -that belongs to the **Department of Education, GNCT Delhi** -will see a new multi-purpose air-conditioned indoor hall come up for netball. Another warm -up hall will be constructed to accommodate two more courts. There will also be an administrative block at the complex to be used by Games authorities. The stadium will also be connected to the nearby Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium



I.G. Stadium Sports Complex



Tyagaraj Sports Complex



Disaster management plan for Commonwealth Games

New Delhi: Terror attack, earthquake, stampede or building collapse during the Commonwealth Games here in 2010? Well, the Delhi government is gearing up to meet any eventuality that might arise during the Games by procuring thermal-imaging cameras, hydraulic rescue tools, 10,000 litre capacity water carriers, 50 ambulances and 1,000 breathing operator sets, reports the widely respected Hindu newspaper. The government has concretised the disaster management plan to meet any eventualities like fire, stampede, earthquake, terror attacks, building collapse or any other possible disaster that might happen during the Games. There will be about 8,000 athletes from 71 countries participating in the Games and the number of officials and visitors is expected to be in thousands.

While 50 fully equipped centralised accident and trauma service (CATS) ambulances will be dedicated for athletes only, there will be a 20-bed clinic with 10-

medical staff functioning round the clock at the Games village. "There will be about 1,000 breathing operator sets made available during the Games," said the official involved with the disaster preparedness plan. Hospitals have been identified for each venue. For example, if an athlete or a spectator is injured at Siri Fort venue then he would be rushed to nearby AIIMS or Safdarjung hospital. Even beds have been also identified to be kept ready for the Games, said the official.

2014 Commonwealth Games

Glasgow (Scotland) has been chosen to host the 20th Commonwealth Games by the Commonwealth Games Federation's General Assembly after beating Abuja (Nigeria) by 47 votes to 24.

Qualities to be a Volunteer

A highlight of recent Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games has been the friendly, appreciative and helpful Volunteers. All volunteers will be seen as ambassadors for the country. The following qualities are expected in a volunteer for the Commonwealth Games 2010 to be held in Delhi. ;

- Flexibility.
- Adaptability.
- Reliability.
- A team approach.
- A positive 'can do' attitude.
- Effective communication skills.
- Minimum Age – must be 18 years of age on or before 1 January 2010.
- Availability to work all assigned shifts.
- Availability to attend assessment, training and accreditation sessions .
- Agreement to wear the official uniform and accreditation pass .
- Comply with all key policy regarding behaviours, presentation and involvement as a volunteer.
- Speak and understand English.

Working hours for volunteers:

Volunteer roles are varied; some will extend for up to several months before the Games whilst others may last only several days. The length of involvement will depend on the assigned role.

A normal volunteer day will usually be 8-10 hours including breaks but some roles may occasionally require longer or shorter shifts. All volunteers engaged during the Games

are required to be available for a minimum of 100 hours and are expected to be available for the full period of the Games.

Kind of roles:

There are a wide range of Volunteer opportunities, some require specific skills, qualifications or experience, but at a minimum all require excellent customer service, good knowledge of English, a friendly smile and a positive attitude.

The Five Components of Effective Communication

- **Empathy:** To be in the shoes of another, perceiving the world as the other person perceives it.
- **Active Listening:** Allowing another to talk uninterruptedly, responding without giving advice and being dismissive; paying full attention to what is being said.
- **Genuineness:** Being honest about our reactions.
- **Sensitivity:** Accepting another's feelings and not being brutally honest; not hurting the other person's feelings.
- **Reassurance:** Being understanding and emotionally supportive.

Improving Communication Skills

- Prepare well and always think before you speak.
- Start in an interesting manner.
- Use the right words.
- Use short words and short sentences.
- Speak slowly and clearly pronouncing each word correctly.
- Emphasize main points by effective modulation of your voice.
- Use appropriate volume.

Ministry to train student-volunteers

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: With an eye on the Commonwealth Games to be hosted here in 2010, the Union Tourism Ministry has launched a short-term training programme under the "earn while you learn" scheme to train youths who can work as student-volunteers.

The main objective of the scheme, the brainchild of Tourism Minister Ambika Soni, is to inculcate appropriate tourism traits and knowledge among the trainees.

A Ministry spokesman said such programmes would be for 21 days and the students pursuing graduation or post-graduation between 18 and 25 years can apply after obtaining a "No Objection Certificate" from the college or university concerned.

These programmes would be conducted by the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management which has branches in Gwalior, Delhi, Bhubaneswar and Goa. The course will not only train the students on various

aspects of tourism but will also teach them aspects of the tourism industry that will enable them to work part-time as volunteers. The students will be taught about Indian society and culture, historical monuments, managerial and behavioural skills, an overview of tourism sector, and public speaking. They will be taken on study tours to places of interest. The aim is to cope with the target of 10 million tourist arrivals in the country by 2010 which has the potential of generating nearly two lakh jobs.

The Hindu, Dec 12, 2007 New Delhi



The Hindu, April 2, 2008



*Kamalesh Sharma,
Commonwealth
Secretary-General. -
PHOTO: REUTERS*

Takes over as chief of Commonwealth

Hasan Suroor

LONDON: Kamalesh Sharma, India's High Commissioner to the U.K. until recently, on Tuesday took over as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth becoming the first Indian to head the 53-member body in what is seen as a sign of India's heightened profile in world affairs.

Turbulent term

He succeeds Don McKinnon who retired after an eight-year turbulent term.

Mr. Sharma, who was appointed to the post last November at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kampala, described the Commonwealth as a force for "global good" and promised to make it more "innovative" in responding to "challenges" of an increasingly globalised world.

"The Commonwealth is a force for genuine and creative partnership in addressing our collective challenges. I look forward to building on its strengths and achievements," he said.

A career diplomat with extensive experience of working for world for a including the U.N., Mr. Sharma is regarded as close to the Congress Party.

His appointment as India's envoy to the U.K. and New Delhi's full-throated backing for him in the run-up to his election as head of the Commonwealth is attributed to his proximity to the ruling establishment.

Ticklish issues

One of the more ticklish issues Mr. Sharma will have to deal with relates to Pakistan which was suspended from the Commonwealth last November following President Pervez Musharraf's decision to impose emergency and curb democratic rights.

Now that Pakistan has a democratically-elected government there will, inevitably, be pressure from Islamabad to revoke the suspension.

Given the sensitive nature of India-Pakistan relations, there is much speculation how Mr. Sharma will tackle the issue.