

## Branding India



FROM LEFT: *Branding India*'s author Amitabh Kant; Arjun Sharma, vice-chairman, World Travel & Tourism Council-India Initiative; Aroon Purie, *India Today* editor-in-chief and director, HarperCollins India; tourism minister Kumari Selja; Montek Singh Ahluwalia, deputy chairman, Planning Commission; and TKA Nair, principal secretary to the PM, at the book launch.

By Mail Today Bureau  
in New Delhi

THE man behind the hugely successful Incredible India campaign, Amitabh Kant, has packed into an information-laden book his wealth of insights acquired during an extended association with the travel and tourism business.

The Delhi launch of the book, *Branding India: An Incredible Story* (Collins Business), on Saturday evoked a stream of thoughts and ideas from government and industry honchos who had joined Kant to celebrate his work.

Introducing the book, which was unveiled by tourism minister Kumari Selja, Kant recalled the bleak background against which the Incredible India campaign was launched.

"In 2001-2002, after the destruction of the World Trade Centre, the war in Afghanistan and the attack on Parliament, there was a huge slump in the tourism industry. Hotel occupancies were at an all-time low. A CNN survey

# The making of an incredible story

projected India as a tourist-unfriendly country. It was a challenge for all of us to bring back the tourists."

Kant is a Kerala-cadre IAS officer of the 1980 batch. He was a joint secretary in the tourism ministry from 2001 to 2007, and is now the principal commissioner and special commissioner (industries), Kerala.

Kant said the ministry's objective was to create a brand that would not only add value to the product (the country's travel and tourism industry), but also contribute to the country's socio-economic growth.

The results were instantly visible. From 2.54 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2001, the num-

ber had ballooned to 5.38 million by the end of 2008; the country had earned Rs 54,050 crore in foreign exchange last year, as against Rs 14,100 crore in 2002.

Selja, who received the first copy of the book, was all praise for the campaign. "I must admit I'm rather new to this sector as I've just been appointed a minister," she said. "But as an outsider, I have been impressed by the Incredible India campaign. It is an incredible story indeed."

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, deputy chairman, Planning Commission, said he had read Kant's book. "If what he wrote is true, then we have a tremendous advantage," he said, referring to the diversity and richness of the

country. "In the last ten years, the sector has visibly improved, bringing a lot of changes to our advantage."

T.K.A. Nair, principal secretary to the Prime Minister and guest of honour, described Kant as a "doer". He said: "I've known the 'hero of the evening' as a colleague and friend for a long time. He has done quite a lot for the industry. I've discovered the other Amitabh now - he has come out with such an incredible story."

The huge success of the book is evident from the fact that it has gone into its second reprint within a month, said Amit Agarwal, managing editor of HarperCollins India.