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## Upbeat tourism industry 'must target 6pc growth'

DOHA: The global travel and tourism industry should grow by nearly six per cent this year, showing it has bounced back from the effects of terrorism, war and the Sars epidemic, experts said yesterday.

The industry, which employs more than 8pc of the world's work force, is poised to grow at 4.5pc per annum over the next 10 years, said the World Travel and Tourism Council.

The council told a tourism conference of 800 delegates that it projected a combined growth of 5.9pc for all travel-related industries this year, bringing the industries to an aggregate income of \$5.5 trillion.

During the past three years, the industries have been set back by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and an epidemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars) in Asia.

But countries were learning how to get tourists to return after such setbacks, WTTC chairman Vincent A Wolfington said.

"Travellers will travel even when they know there is a risk of terrorism, as long as they feel that countries they are travelling to are on top of it, and trying to minimise the risks," said Wolfington, speaking on the sidelines of the two-day conference that ended yesterday.

"The trend we have seen since 9/11 is that with each incidence of terrorism, the rebound and the resilience of the economy has been quicker," Wolfington said.

Delegates from Turkey and Spain confirmed his point, saying their economies had taken only weeks to recover from recent terror atrocities.

Jose Luis Zoreda, who runs Exceltur, which represents the Spanish travel industry, said 80pc of firms in Spain have reported that they recovered within four weeks from the March 11 train bombings that killed 191 people.

"Despite the events of March 11, our tourism forecasts for 2004 remain unchanged," said Zoreda. Spain receives some 53m tourists a year.

The deputy under-secretary at the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, Ali Alp, said his country had also had recovered quickly from the suicide bombings that killed 62 people in Istanbul in November.

"Just after the incidents in Istanbul, there was a roughly 50pc drop in tourist arrivals to Istanbul," Alp said. "But we have recovered, and tourist arrivals are above last year." Alp said the government had launched a \$60m promotion and advertising campaign to attract travellers.

But while countries such as Spain and Turkey have the resources to recover fast, poorer nations such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Morocco have not bounced back so quickly from terrorist attacks.

At the conference, a frequent target of criticism for failing to invest in tourist promotion was, strangely enough, the government of the world's richest country.

Douglas Baker, deputy assistant secretary for tourism at the US Department of Commerce, said he had virtually no promotion budget to attract foreign travellers.

"The US has historically never promoted itself as a tourist destination," Baker said.

He added that the Congress had allocated about \$15m to promotion, but later redirected the money to other priorities. Even small countries such as Portugal allocated more than \$50m a year on advertising.