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Heir Apparent to open Global Travel and Tourism Summit today

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DOHA: The Heir Apparent H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani will today open the prestigious 4th Global Travel and Tourism Summit at the Sheraton Doha hotel, which will be attended by over 30 ministers and travel and tourism industry captains from around the world. The summit is hosted by the national carrier Qatar Airways.

As part of the summit, organised by the World Travel and Tourism Council, for an exclusive club of leaders from the airline, hospitality, travel, tourism and related industries, Akbar Al Baker, chief executive officer of Qatar Airways and chairman of the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) will unveil the Qatar Tourism Master Plan this afternoon. The CEO is also a member of the WTTC along with some of the top industry captains. Rick Miller, the WTTC executive vice president will make a presentation on the latest economic potential of travel and tourism in countries joining the European Union. An awards ceremony of the Arab Air Carriers Association will also be held during the summit. Today morning's events include the WTTC's Annual General Meeting.

A WTTC spokesman said that some 500 delegates from around the world had registered by Thursday afternoon to participate in the summit, which included over 150 journalists from Qatar and abroad. More participants were expected to sign-up for the event yesterday and today.

Special sessions scheduled for today are under the themes 'Setting the Scene' by Jean-Claude Baumgarten, the WTTC president, 'Forging Ahead' with Gene Sperling, the former chief economic advisor to the White House and 'A New Approach' with Ian Davis, managing director, McKinsey and Co. The sessions will be moderated by renowned journalists such as Nik Gowing from the BBC World, Peter Greenberg, travel editor, NBC and the chief correspondent for the Discovery Networks and the Travel Channel. These session will discuss various issues related to the travel and tourism industry including 9-11 and the Iraq war, political will and the business leaders who are driving a change in the industry as well as the various challenges faced by the sector.

On Sunday, the special breakfast session will see the presentation of WTTC's National Initiatives on India with Yogesh Chandra, secretary general, WTTC India Initiative, Amitabh Kant, joint secretary, Ministry of Tourism, India, NK Singh, member of the Planning Commission, Lalit Suri, chairman of WTTC's India Initiative and Rathi Vinay Jha, secretary of India's tourism ministry. Miguel Angel Villanueva, head of finance, economy and tourism development for the City of Madrid and Jose Luis Zoreda, CEO, Excelsur will make a presentation on the impact of Madrid bombings on the Spanish capital's tourism industry. This session will be moderated by Baumgarten.

The benefits to governments stimulating travel and tourism will be discussed at the Ministers' Panel tomorrow morning with contributions by Dr Ali Alp, deputy undersecretary at Turkey's tourism and culture ministry, Douglas Baker, deputy assistant secretary for Service Industries, Tourism and Finance at the US Department of Commerce, Akel Biltaji, advisor on tourism and foreign investment promotion to King Abdulla of Jordan and Renee Webb, Bermuda's tourism minister, among others at the session moderated by Arnie Weissman, editor-in-chief of the Travel Weekly, USA.

The Power of News and its impact on tourism will come up for discussion with Dr Kazem Behbehani, assistant director general, World Health Organisation at a session that will be moderated by Nik Gowing.

BBC World is the Official Broadcast Partner for the summit and Platinum Sponsors include Al Jazeera, Airbus Industrie, Arabian Travel Market, Commercialbank, Doha Bank, General Electric (GE), Qatar National Hotels Cp, Qatar Tourism Authority, Qatar National Bank and Qatar Telecom.