

## Interview of Ambassador with RIA Novosti (7th September, 2021)

**Q: Does India plan to increase counter terrorism cooperation with Russia in view of the Afghanistan crisis?**

**Ambassador:** The situation in Afghanistan is a matter of concern for the entire region. India & Russia are particularly affected by these developments. This situation poses threat to the interests of both India & Russia on account of the possibility of rise of terrorist groups, increased drug trafficking, organized crime, the flow of refugees. But also that a very large amount of very advanced weapons are now in the hands of a large number of armed groups.

During the last year and a half, a number of international efforts have been made to address the Afghan situation. The Doha Agreement of February 2020, the Troika Plus talks - finally the results of these international efforts were not matched by the subsequent developments.

India was not a direct participant in the Doha talks. India was also not part of the Troika Plus mechanism, but as I said, these mechanisms have not yielded the right results. I think one lesson is that it is better that India and Russia work together with respect to Afghanistan. That is the most important lesson for us.

Of course, there's now a new situation in Afghanistan. All the foreign troops have left. The Taliban has taken over in Kabul, but instability continues. India and Russia will continue to discuss the evolving situation including on the issue of recognition of the Taliban. As you are aware there was a telephone conversation between President Putin and Prime Minister on the 24th of August which focused specifically on the Afghan situation. It was agreed by both the leaders that India and Russia should work together for which a permanent consultative mechanism was to be established. Secretary of the Russian Security Council His Excellency Mr Nikolai Patrushev will be visiting Delhi on 8th September (Tomorrow). He has a very high-powered delegation, including from various agencies and ministries, and he will have talks with his Indian counterpart - Mr. Ajit Doval who is the National Security Advisor of India. Mr Patrushev will also be meeting the Indian leadership including meetings at the highest level.

We expected discussions between Indian, Russia to be very in-depth and action-oriented. India & Russia have a lot of common interests in addressing the Afghan situation, including in the field of anti-terrorism. There are very fast moving developments in Afghanistan. Today there are news reports of a number of demonstrations in Kabul. Press reports say a number of slogans were raised against external interference in Afghanistan, particularly from Pakistan. This is what the press reports say.

Whatever the situation, I think India & Russia have a common position, a common approach. We are also interested in the stability of Central Asian states. So this is how we wish to move forward. We look forward to a very successful visit of Mr Patrushev to Delhi, starting tomorrow. The important fact is the first visit of Mr. Patrushev to any foreign country after the recent Afghan

developments.

**Q: Mr Ambassador you mentioned, Mr. Patrushev will visit India in a while. Do you have any information about other bilateral visits between Indian Russia?**

**Ambassador:** Yes. Prime Minister Modi welcomed President Putin to visit India on an annual bilateral visit. No dates have been fixed because of the evolving COVID situation, but we hope that this visit will take place at least towards the end of the year. We expect it to be a very successful visit. A number of preparatory meetings have taken place. We always welcome President Putin when he visits India. There has been a tradition of annual bilateral visits between the two countries as part of our Special & Privileged Strategic Partnership. It could not be held for the last year, because of the COVID situation. But we hope this visit will take place before the end of the year.

**Q: And as before, to the economic questions, we know that India has a very huge and high level delegation at Eastern Economic Forum. How successful was the recent visit of the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and the Indian participation in Eastern Economic Forum?**

**Ambassador:** Yes, Indeed. India had a very strong participation in the Eastern Economic Forum '21 in Vladivostok. Our Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi made a very important speech, a video recorded speech that was played during the plenary session in the presence of President Putin. Prime Minister's speech reiterated India's commitment to India's Act Far East Policy, which includes deepening cooperation, including the provision of \$1 bn credit line for Indian business to participate in the development of the Russian Far East, but also creating new connectivities and an Energy Bridge from Yamal to Vladivostok to Chennai. So energy is emerging as a very important pillar of our cooperation. India was represented at the EEF by our Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas - Minister Hardeep Puri. He had a very strong business delegation along with him. The Indian energy companies were well represented.

He had a number of meetings with his counterpart Energy Minister of Russia His Excellency Mr Shulginov, head of Rosneft, Mr Sechin, head of Novatek, Mr Mikhelson, the head of Gazpromneft, Mr Dyukov, the head of SIBUR, Mr Konov. We expect Indian investments into Russia but also Russian investments into India. There are some very major projects under discussion. Various levels of discussions are taking place at the company level, at the government level. These projects include Arctic LNG 2, the Vostok project, and petrochemicals. The Russian side is interested in the gas market in India and LNG. Our Minister also had an opportunity to visit the Zvezda shipyard. We were very happy to note that Mazagon Docks Ltd of Mumbai has concluded a contract with the Zvezda shipyard to build some shipping components for the big ships that are being built, especially for the Northern Sea Route & the Arctic.

There are a number of Indian companies that are sending manpower to projects in the Far East - in the Amur region, we are expecting even more manpower to come up. Coking coal is another area of cooperation, ports, ceramics, and of course, diamonds. There was a meeting through

video conference between Saka (Yakutia) Governor and the Chief Minister of Gujarat. And that too is a very promising area.

**Q. And the last question you mentioned, gas and energy sectors- does India have plans to increase the supply of LNG from Russia?**

**Ambassador:** Yes that is definitely one of the areas of discussion. We intend to increase the percentage of Russian imports. India & Russia have made huge investments in each other's energy. But liquid hydrocarbons from Russia into India are only 1%. We intend to increase this. The Indian economy will grow 8-10% in the next few years and Indian energy consumption will rise by double that amount. So there are huge prospects for Russian companies to participate in India's energy security.