

# Young and Growing

Supporting friends, extending cooperation



## H.E. Mr. SUBRATA BHATTACHARJEE

Ambassador of India



India, a friendly country and a fast-growing economy, has a new Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Subrata Bhattacharjee. We used the opportunity to talk to him in the beginning of his term.

**India and Serbia have had excellent relations right from the start – from the time of the Declaration of independence of the Dominion and the SFR Yugoslavia, both countries have been dedicated to freedom, anti-colonialism and autonomous development. How this resonates in these times, once again sharply divided world?**

— When India gained independence, the world was predominantly bipolar. Therefore, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was the need of

the hour for the developing countries to ensure that they were not dominated by either of the world powers. The leaders of India and SFR Yugoslavia played a pioneering role in Non-Aligned Movement. With the change in geo-politics, the world has now turned multi-polar. But the developing countries still need to ensure that they

## ➤ CLOSE COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY BETWEEN SERBIA AND INDIA, CONTINUES AND HELP THE WORLD IN TAKING RIGHT STAND ON MANY MAJOR ISSUES

are not dominated by any of the world powers. Despite the change in geo-politics and the transformation of individual nation's perspective, there is a continuing need for protecting a nation's self interest against outside interference. Moreover, many new areas have come up that need cooperation among

developing countries. For example, United Nations is in particular need of urgent reforms. A more representative, legitimate and effective UN Security Council which is reflective of the current geo-political realities is needed more than ever to better address today's global conflicts and crises. On another front, India has a principled stand

on respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations. Both Serbia and India share common views on this. Our bilateral ties have strengthened considerably with two recent high level visits - the visit to India by then Serbian PM Vučić in 2017 (now President) and the visit to Serbia by Vice Pres-

ident of India in 2018. Thus, close cooperation among developing countries, particularly between Serbia and India, continues and help the world in taking right stand on many major issues.

## **How do you evaluate the political situation in the world today? Will we ever live in peace?**

— While the bipolar world that existed till the nineteen hundred eighties has turned multi-polar now, the chances of conflict have not been eliminated. It is true that major powers are now less likely to start a war against each other. However, we have seen outbreak of regional conflicts in some areas created mainly by outside intervention. Large scale migration caused by continuing regional conflicts has resulted in extreme hardship for the migrants as well as economic and social problems in some transit/receiving countries. Terrorism is another menace that the world will have to live with ➤

for some time. While the enemy is well defined in case a conventional war, terrorist attacks have brought a new dimension in the threat perception. Chances of Weapons of Mass Destructions (WMD) falling in the hands of terrorists are a major source of concern. To tackle this global menace, India proposed, as early as in 1996, a draft 'Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism' as part of the broader movement in the international community to strengthen international laws on counter terrorism and for codifying well accepted norms for global cooperation on counter terrorism, into a formal instrument of international law. However, very little progress has been made on this. It seems, the world will have to live with these problems for many years to come.

**India is a member of BRICS and G-20, an emerging economy at par with China with economic growth and demographic potentials. The future seems quite bright?**

— Yes, India is a member of both BRICS as well as G-20. BRICS represents 42% of the world's population. In economic terms, BRICS accounts for 23% of the world's GDP and 16% of global trade. India attaches great importance to this body. After more than a decade of existence, BRICS has developed a robust framework for cooperation. While trade and economy have been the foundation of our cooperation, our endeavours today touch diverse areas of technology, tradition, culture, agriculture, environment, energy, sports, and ICT. G-20 is also a major economic grouping for promoting multi-faceted cooperation among the twenty largest economies of the world. Through the ten years of its existence, G-20 has strived to promote stable and sustainable global growth. This objective is of particular significance for developing countries and emerging economies such as India, more so because G-20 represents 90% of global GDP, 80% of the world trade and more than two-third of the world's population. Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the recent G-20 Summit hosted by Argentina in Buenos Aires in November-December 2018. The theme of the Summit, "Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development", is of great importance to India. Globalization has posed many serious economic and



**➤ AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE OF EXISTENCE, BRICS HAS DEVELOPED A ROBUST FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION**

social challenges to the developing countries. There is a serious need to create a rule-based world order. India participates in these bodies towards that noble goal.

**Of course, one of the problems in our countries is human development and infrastructure. In India the population is growing, in Serbia shrinking. Will these problems mark the next step in our developments?**

— India accounts for about one-sixth of humanity. India also has a young population. By 2020, the average age in India will be 29 mak-

ing it the world's youngest country with 64% of the population in the working age group. India also has the third-largest scientific and technical manpower in the world coming out of 162 universities. Sectors like Information Technology, Biotechnology etc. that rely heavily on the availability of skill manpower have naturally contributed greatly to India's growth. Large population also demands creation of adequate infrastructure, often putting pressure on environment. However, the developmental needs of the population coming out of poverty cannot be

**THE 150<sup>th</sup> GANDHI BIRTH ANNIVERSARY**

➤ Since 2 October 2018, a number of activities have been organized to celebrate 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. A video on his life and quotes was projected in front of City Hall of Belgrade as well as Indian Embassy Chancery. A function was organized to release seven commemorative stamps on Mahatma Gandhi brought out by India Post. A leading opera singer of Serbia, Ms. Jadranka Jovanovic, sung the favourite bhajan of Mahatma Gandhi, 'Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye Je'. The video song made for this has been appreciated by many Indians and Serbians. In fact, this bhajan has been sung by leading singers in around 150 countries. Additionally, every month I am going to one Serbian school to speak on Mahatma Gandhi and his ideals. I have seen a warm response from these students. Activities like this will continue till 2 October 2019.

overlooked. Therefore, while India is building skill and infrastructure, India is also emphasising on sustainable development through preservation of environment, use of clean technology, reduction of carbon emission etc, not only in India but also in the world at large. For example, under International Solar Alliance, India is assisting other countries to promote use of solar power. India itself is targeting annual generation of 175 GW of solar power. India will be happy to work with Serbia in these areas.

**India is accumulating wealth, thus transforming from receiver of the capital, into a lender and investor. What investments can we expect in Serbia?**

— With a GDP of US\$ 2.597 trillion and 8% GDP growth, India today is the fastest growing large economy in the world. India's annual trade stood at US\$ 769 billion growing at 16% per annum. India has undertaken a number of economic reform measures that have improved India's rank in World Bank's Doing Business Report by 53 positions in past two years. This involved simplification of investment procedure, reduction of paper work, unification of tax structure etc. While India is building its economy, India is also assisting other friendly countries through aid, lines of credit, capacity building and foreign investment. In past three years, Indian companies have invested US\$ 40 billion abroad. The total financial commitment in that period is US\$ 120 billion. In case of Serbia, Indian companies have already invested in sectors like manufacturing tractors, IT park, food processing, manufacturing aluminum panels, garbage disposal containers, railway equipment etc. Considering that Serbia is a member of EU Customs Union and has FTAs with Russia and many other countries, there is great potential for attracting further investment from India. Agriculture plays a major role in Serbian economy. In IT sector, India has the capability and Serbia can gain from this expertise. These are the potential areas for Indian companies investing in Serbia.

**We met at Stara Planina during the promotion of Hello! Travel: Serbia. Recently India and Serbia abolished visa regime mutually. Can we expect more Indian tourists in Serbia and of course, vice versa?**

— India introduced e-Visa for

Serbian nationals in 2016. Under the scheme, Serbians can apply for tourist visa, business visa etc. online and receive the visa by email in few days. Serbia responded positively to this and abolished the visa requirement for Indian nationals in 2017. This has made touristic visits from each other's country easier. So far over two thousand Serbians have taken e-Visa for India online. Similarly, few thousand Indians have availed the visa free facility for travelling to Serbia. This even includes some relatives and friends of mine. With impressive economic growth in India, many Indians are travelling abroad as tourists. Serbia with its beautiful landscape, clean environment and fascinating history & culture can offer much to such Indian tourists. There is also scope for attracting Indian tourists coming to other countries of the region. India receives many European tourists. Greater representation of Serbians among them will be a welcome development. In short, the tourism sector offers great potential in the coming years.

**Indian culture is one of the few most striking and oldest cultures**

**in the world, a magic place, incredible, truly, as the slogan says. Your embassy did a lot in cultural cooperation. Popular culture, like yoga, is gaining ground – the people can participate in it. How about some even more contemporary trends? Indian film festivals in more cities of Serbia or perhaps, a band from India performing at Exit Festival as an idea? What are the plans in that field?**

**➤ CONSIDERING THAT SERBIA IS A MEMBER OF EU CUSTOMS UNION AND HAS FTAS WITH RUSSIA AND MANY OTHER COUNTRIES, THERE IS GREAT POTENTIAL FOR ATTRACTING FURTHER INVESTMENT FROM INDIA**

— In today's world, diplomacy is no more restricted to the political domain. Cultural Diplomacy is now one of the focus areas of India's foreign policy initiatives. In that spirit, Indian Embassy in Belgrade lays high emphasis on promoting Indian culture in Serbia. In past few years, Indian Embassy organized several performances of Indian musical instruments such

as 'Rudra Veena', Tabla, Guitar and 'Stree Shakti' Hindustani Instrumentals, and Indian classical dance performances of Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Pantomime dance ('Where the Shadow Ends') and Katkatha Puppet dance.

During my time this year, I organized an exhibition of embroidery fabrics from Himalayas ('Rumals of Chamba') at National Assembly of Serbia and an exhibition of 70 years of diplomatic rela-

tions between India and Yugoslavia at National Archives of Yugoslavia. There are also plans for some more exhibitions and dance performances from India. These are usually finalized two-three months before the visit. Celebration of International Day of Yoga in Belgrade will of course continue. I deeply appreciate the spontaneous interest Serbians take in Indian culture,

particularly in Yoga. But for their participation, celebration of International Day of Yoga in Belgrade could not have been such a success. I have taken a new initiative of involving Serbians in performance of Indian dances. During Diwali Dinner at my residence in November this year, a group of Serbian girls performed Indian dances. This trend will continue and I propose to organize more performances of Indian dances by Serbian groups. I am sure this will greatly popularize Indian dances among Serbian youth.

Another welcome development is shooting of Indian movies in Serbia. Bollywood (acronym for Hindi film industry) produces largest number of movies in the world. Additionally, India has a thriving film industry in regional languages like Tamil, Telugu, Bengali etc. Four-five such movies have already been shot in Serbia. In October 2018, one such movie 'Soorma' was screened in Belgrade. Shooting of Indian movies in Serbia will not only generate revenue for Serbia but also popularize Serbian tourist spots among Indian tourists. This will in turn attract such Indian tourists to Serbia. **D&C**



**BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL**  
**EDUCATION FOR SUCCESS**

*Season's Greetings*



Smetanina 12, 11040 Belgrade, Serbia  
 +381 11 30 66 096 | info@bis.edu.rs

www.british-int-school.org.uk