Sharing Common Views

The visit of the Hon'ble Vice President of India to Serbia was of great significance, as it was a high-level visit from India after a gap of 29 years. The visit also took place in response to the visit of then Serbian Prime Minister (now President) Vučić in 2017, which was the first high-level visit from India after a gap of 29 years. The visit also took place in response to the visit of then Serbian President, as it was a high-level visit from India after a gap of 29 years.

Given that you arrived in Serbia only recently, what do you see as today’s priorities of the bilateral cooperation that was established 70 years ago?

In the last few months, India has taken some positive steps to improve relations and deepen our cooperation. We are working closely with Serbia to address some key challenges, such as economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and tourism. India is also interested in exploring opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and technology.

Indian Vice President Naidu visited Serbia recently. How would you assess the effects of his discussions with Serbian officials?

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Has implementation of the two Agreements signed during the aforementioned visit started related to cooperation in the field of protection of plant-life and in air traffic? What specifically will these agreements ease when it comes to cooperation between the two countries?

The Agreement on Cooperation in Plant Health and Plant Quarantine and an Air Services Agreement were signed. The first Agreement is meant to facilitate bilateral trade in plants and plant products. Agriculture plays a major role in the Serbian economy and there are great prospects for exporting agricultural products from India to Serbia, and even vice versa. In fact, exports of some agricultural products have already begun. This Agreement provides a framework for greater and safer trade in agricultural products between the two countries. The Air Services Agreement signed during the visit replaces the previous Air Traffic Agreement signed by India and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 2003. Moreover, the global civil aviation industry has gone through major changes in the past fifteen years. The new Air Services Agreement incorporates the changes required in modern times and in air traffic. The agreements between the two countries in this area will be another new area for closer economic cooperation.

Indian company TAFE became the owner of Serbia’s IMT factory during 2018. Have you had the opportunity to acquaint your- self with the plans of the Indian owners of this once very successful company?

Agriulture plays a major role in Serbia, which is a net exporter of agricultural products and has the capabilities and Serbia can gain from this expertise. Tourism promotion, attracting Indian tourists to Serbia and vice versa, can be another new area for closer economic cooperation.

You are aware that the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is in crisis. India has not recognised the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo. Do you believe that – alongside the European Union – the United Nations should also be more actively involved in resolving this issue?

The United Nations has a key role to play in promoting peace and stability in the region. India is supportive of the United Nations’ efforts to maintain international peace and security. The UN Security Council plays a crucial role in maintaining international peace and security.

We certainly need greater trade and investment, and closer people-to-person contact

We need to promote people-to-people contacts and cultural exchange to strengthen our bilateral ties. India and Serbia have a long history of cultural interactions, and we should build on this legacy to foster greater understanding and cooperation between our two countries.

How will you celebrate India’s Republic Day on 26th January?

India’s Republic Day is a national holiday celebrated on 26th January every year. It marks the anniversary of the 1950 adoption of the Constitution of India. The day is celebrated with great enthusiasm and fanfare across the country. In Belgrade, the Embassy of India will organize a reception to celebrate the occasion. The reception will include musical performances, dance, and a speech by the Ambassador. The event will also feature the Indian national flag being hoisted by the Indian Ambassador. The reception will be attended by Serbian officials, media representatives, and friends of India.
Forging A Deeper Friendship

Indian Vice President H.E. M. Venkaiah Naidu’s official visit to Serbia, from 14th to 16th September 2018, stands as testimony to the strong historical relationship shared between these two friendly nations.

The Honourable Vice President of India, H.E. M. Venkaiah Naidu, paid an official visit to Serbia from 14th to 16th September 2018. This was the first high-level visit of an Indian dignitary to Serbia after a gap of three decades and came during the year in which the two countries celebrated the 70th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations. The Vice President was accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising Shri Pratap Shukla, Minister of State for Finance, four Indian Members of Parliament, senior officials, a business delegation and representatives of the media. During his high-level engagements, Vice President Naidu held detailed discussions on a range of bilateral and multilateral issues with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and National Assembly of Serbia Speaker Maja Gojković, as well as addressing a business forum.

During his meeting with President Vučić, Vice President Naidu discussed important aspects of bilateral relations, as well as regional issues that are of common interest to both countries. The two leaders expressed their commitment to building upon the long-standing friendly ties between the two countries. In the area of economic cooperation, the two countries agreed to enhance cooperation in priority areas like agriculture, food processing, defence manufacturing, science and technology, information technology, infrastructure, tourism and pharmaceuticals. During the joint media briefing, President Vučić complimented India’s political leadership on the country’s stellar economic results. As he said, “India is witnessing exceptional economic progress. We are happy for the country that has been our long-time friend and well wisher”. He also thanked India for supporting Serbia’s territorial integrity. President Vučić then hosted a banquet in honour of Vice President Naidu.

Vice President Naidu met with National Assembly of Serbia Speaker Maja Gojković and held detailed discussions on a range of bilateral and multilateral issues. In a rare gesture, the visiting vice president was invited to address a special session of the Serbian National Assembly. He did so in the same parliament hall where former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru addressed world leaders upon the launch of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), alongside then veteran Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito. In his hour-long address to the lawmakers of the host country, Vice President Naidu recalled fondly the close affinity and shared vision with which the leaders of both countries played a key role in launching the NAM.

Vice President Naidu and President Vučić jointly addressed the India-Serbia Business Forum on 15th September, which included the participation of a large number of Indian companies and an Indian business delegation. The forum included discussions regarding bilateral cooperation in the areas of agriculture, energy, pharmacy, the IT industry, tourism, education etc. Speaking at the Forum, the Vice President gave a detailed account of the rapid strides being taken by India in various fields, including enabling, predictable and reform-orientated financial and investment ecosystems offering mutually beneficial partnerships. President Vučić took the opportunity to invite Indian investors to Serbia, which would open them up to new markets thanks to Serbia’s existing Free Trade Agreements. So far there have been few cases of investments by Indian companies in Serbia, with Indian tractor manufacturer TAFE taking over Serbia’s IMT (Industry of Motors and Tractors). Moreover, the Embassy Group of India has invested $20 million in the construction of an IT park in Serbia. Bilateral trade between India and Serbia reached a total of approximately 200 million euros in 2017.

With full military honours and the playing of the two national anthems, Vice President Naidu – accompanied by Serbian Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin – laid a wreath beside the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Belgrade’s Mount Avala. To commemorate the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Serbia’s national postal service, Pošta Srbije, and India’s Department of Posts jointly released commemorative stamps featuring renowned Serbian scientist and inventor Nikola Tesla and India’s great spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda. Vice President Naidu noted that Swami Vivekananda’s thoughts and ideas had left a deep impression on Tesla’s works.

In the presence of Indian Vice President Naidu and Serbian President Vučić, both sides signed two agreements: Indian Ambassador to Serbia H.E. Subrata Bhattacharyya and Serbian Construction, Transport & Infrastructure Minister Zorana Mihajlović signed a revised Air Services Agreement, aimed at boosting trade and tourism. The signing of the agreement on air services has created possibilities to establish direct flights between the two countries and future commercial code-sharing agreements between airlines.

The other agreement, on Cooperation in Plant Protection and Plant Quarantine, was co-signed by Serbian Agriculture, Forestry & Water Management Minister Branislav Nedimović and Ambassador Bhattacharyya. This agreement seeks to improve bilateral trade in fruit, vegetables, processed foods etc.
ISRO: Flying high!

India’s space agency, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is counted among the top six Government space agencies in the world today. Its vision to “harness space technology for national development” has truly set very high standards for the rest of the world. ISRO has in fact put India in an elite club of nations with outstanding space technology advancements with more than 100 satellite launches.

- ISRO built India’s first satellite, Aryabhata, which was launched by the Soviet Union on 19 April 1975.
- In 1980, ‘Rohini’ became the first satellite to be placed in orbit by an Indian-made launch vehicle, PSLV.
- ISRO sent a lunar orbiter, Chandrayaan-1, on 22 October 2008 and a Mars orbiter, “Mars Orbiter Mission”, on 5 November 2013, which entered Mars orbit on 24 September 2014, making India the first nation to succeed on its first attempt to Mars, and ISRO the fourth space agency in the world as well as the first space agency in Asia to reach Mars orbit.
- On 5th June 2017, India scored a double success, launching its latest - and heaviest till that time - communication satellite GSAT-19 with its brand new and heaviest rocket - the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle-MkIII (GSLV-MkIII-D2) on 14 November 2018.
- GSAT-11 is the next generation high throughput communication satellite that will play a vital role in providing broadband services across the country. The satellite, weighing 5,854 kg, is the heaviest Indian-made equipment that the ISRO put into its orbit.
- ISRO’s aims at launching India’s first human mission by 2022.

Surajkund International Crafts Mela (Fair)

A splash of colour, the rhythm of drum beats, and joy de vivre came together at Surajkund in Faridabad, Haryana (India), during the first fortnight of February every year: the curtain rises on the acclaimed annual Surajkund International Crafts Mela on 1st February, opening a celebration of Indian folk traditions and cultural heritage. Occupying a place of pride on the international touristist calendar, more than a million visitors, including thousands of foreign tourists, create crowds at this fair. The Surajkund Fair is unique for its showcasing of the richness and diversity of handicrafts, hand-looms and the cultural fabric of India, while it is also the world’s largest crafts fair.

Over the years, this annual fair has come to occupy a place of pride and prominence on the Indian tourist calendar. Previous editions of the fair have attracted more than 1.2 million visitors, with events unfolding through a wonderful range of textiles, paintings, wood stock, ivory work, pottery, terracotta, stonework, lacquerware, cane and grass products.

This largest crafts fair in the world is jointly hosted by the Indian Union Ministries of Tourism, Textiles, Culture and External Affairs, in coordination with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Tourism Department of the State of Haryana. More than 20 countries and all Indian states will participate in 2019’s 33rd Surajkund International Crafts Fair.

The multi-cuisine Food Court provides ethnic cuisine from all over the world, which proves immensely popular with visitors. The scintillating folk performances at the two ‘Chaupals’ (open air theatres) and mesmerizing evening recitals at the ‘Natyashala’ (Theatre) only add to entertainment content. There are designated areas for amusement, adventure sports and fairground rides, making this a must-visit event. The Surajkund International Crafts Mela offers visitors a once-in-a-lifetime experience.
India’s ranking on the list of the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index for 2019 climbed 23 places to 77th among 190 surveyed countries, making it the only country to rank among the top 10 improvers for the second consecutive year.

India’s leap is significant when one considers that India improved its rank by 30 places last year – a rare feat for such large and diverse countries as India. As a result of continued efforts exerted by the Government of India, the country has improved its ranking by 53 places in the last two years and 65 in the last four. India has improved its ranking in six of ten indicators, moving closer to international best practices (Distance to Frontier score) on seven of ten indicators. The most dramatic improvements, however, have been registered in indicators related to ‘Construction Permits’ and ‘Cross-Border Trade’.

In the issuance of construction permits, India improved its ranking from 181st in 2017 to 52nd in 2018, marking an improvement of 129 places in a single year. In terms of ‘Cross-Border Trade’, India’s ranking improved by 66 places, from 146th in 2017 to 80th in 2018.

The most important features of India’s performance this year are:

- Improvement has taken place due to the commitment of the Government of India to carry out comprehensive and complex reforms, supported by the bureaucracy that has shifted its mindset from that of a regulator to a facilitator. The Government has undertaken an extensive exercise of stakeholder consultations in order to better understand the challenges confronting industry, re-engineering government processes in order to provide simplified and streamlined processes to create an environment in the country that’s more conducive to doing business. As a result of continued efforts, India’s ranking has improved as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall rank</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTF</td>
<td>53.97</td>
<td>56.05</td>
<td>60.76</td>
<td>67.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The eight indicators in which India has improved its rank over last four years are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Current Rank</th>
<th>Improvement in last 2 years</th>
<th>Improvement in last 4 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction Permits</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Electricity</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading Across Borders</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying Taxes</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolving Insolvency</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcing Contracts</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting a Business</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Credit</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

India improves its rank in BRICS countries from 5th (in 2014) to 3rd.

Rank improved in 6 indicators over last year.

53 rank improvement over 2 years.

65 rank improvement over 4 years.

Way Forward - 2019:

1. Paying Taxes: GST implementation has been acknowledged, only partial impact has been taken into account, but improvement is expected to be factored next year.
2. Resolving Insolvency: Increased usage will lead to recognition; the indicator will improve as more insolvent companies opt for reorganization plans instead of liquidation.
3. Enforcing Contracts: Faster resolution of commercial disputes through dedicated commercial courts.
4. Registering Property: Digitization of land records and maps and transparency on encumbrances will ease the process of registering property.