



Фото: Виктор Шлынов

Mr. Vishvas Sapkal, Consul General of India

## Interview with Consul General of India Mr. Vishvas Sapkal

### Mr. Consul General, tell us about the history and the modern relationship between India and Russia

This year, India & Russia are celebrating 65th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relationship. However, the engagement of India and Russia with each other has a long and illustrious past. The Tver merchant Afanasy Nikitin first visited India in 1469 that was almost 3 decades before Vasco da Gama. The Great Silk Route was famous since ancient period and Indian merchants and traders landed in Astrakhan around 1615 and settled /flourished there.

Since 18th century, famous Indologists like G.Lebedev, N. Novikov, Count Novarov, Prof. P. Petrov, I.Minayev, Dr. S.Oldenburger, Prof. F. Sherbatskoi, V. Vereshchagin, N. Roerich and others had done commendable works in keeping rich scientific/literary/ artistic/cultural (including matrimonial) linkages.

Vasily von Klemm opened the first Russian post in India on November 22, 1900, as the first 'Consul of the Russian Empire' in Mumbai, which later became the Consulate General in 1905. Diplomatic relations were established on 13th April 1947.

### How will you describe India's progress after Independence?

The span of 65 years in the life of nation is actually very small; however the progress done by India in this short span is remarkable. Indian democracy is widely respected as one of the largest and vibrant democracies in the world. Almost last 15 years, Indian economy has seen > 7% GDP growth.

Indian IT, pharmaceuticals, telecom and the services sector, amongst others, have carved out respectable place in the world. With a size of US\$ 1.5 trillion, Indian economy became the 4th largest on purchasing power parity basis in the world and touched record production of food-grains over 250mn tons per annum. India has become 2nd most attractive destination for FDI in the world. Yes, lot to be achieved, but India is on the right path of nation building and fulfilling aspirations of its 1.2bn people.

### What are the main fields of our cooperation?

Indo-Russian partnership is unique, multidimensional and multifaceted, one that is deep-rooted, rock-solid, and exemplary in many ways. Both countries share long-term cooperation in key areas as defense, space, nuclear energy, science & technology, and trade & economic cooperation and continue to promote cooperation in priority sectors such as oil and gas, pharmaceuticals, and information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology, medical sciences, agrochemicals, and meteorology.

The bilateral cooperation in establishment of steel plants at Bhilai, Bokaro and Durgapur in India in 1950s, became the symbols of the great friendship. The 'expansion in military-technical cooperation in the late 1960s', as well as the signing of the 'Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation' in August 1971, were important milestones in building India's security environment. India & Russia became strategic partnership in 2000 and later "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" in 2010.

Tell us, please, about events, organized for celebration of 65th anniversary of diplomatic relationship

In March 2012, "Best of India" exhibition of small and medium scale industries was organized first in St. Petersburg and then in Velikiy Novgorod, Pskov and Petrozovodsk.

In April 2012, "Open India" Festival was organized in Moscow and St. Petersburg, which included screening of 15 modern Indian movies along with other Indian cultural performances like Quwali. The Indian festival is being organized in Arkhangelsk along with the Margaritinskiy Festival in September 2012.

### What are the changes in modern Indian society due to the influence of Europe. Is it a positive tendency?

In the present era of "world as global village", no country can remain isolated from the changes/events happening in the other parts of the world. Thus, the changes happening in the other parts of the world including that of Europe affect India and its society also. India since ancient period known as melting point, it is known for accepting things from other countries, societies, but its specialty is in getting things Indianised. Modern India society enjoys benefits of best of technologies available as well as it strives to keep its Indian culture intact. Human being always strives for the best. I think this as a positive tendency.

### What places of interest would you recommend to Russian tourists?

India's tourism potential is immense. It is a country with many exquisite locations, a diverse culture with many colorful festivals, and a rich variety of traditional arts and crafts, foods and customs. Being an ancient civilization, the country is endowed with heritage sites of great historical value and aesthetic beauty.

More recently, Indian tourism has seen the introduction of many new areas, such as golf tourism, cruise, adventure, rural and medical tourism and even the Buddhist Circuit.

Indian Thali (dish of Indian food items) in every state offers so much that it becomes difficult to start with or choose what to eat and what to not, same is the case for Indian tourists destinations. I could mention some of these.

In the Northern India Delhi-Agra-Jaipur is a golden triangle. In Agra there is famous Taj Mahal - first in the list of the seven wonders of the world. Srinagar, Gulmarg Monasteries, Golden Temple etc. In the Western India, you must visit Mumbai, Ajanta-Ellora, Raigarh, Pratappgarh, Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani and unique Konkan area and Goa, well known for Russian tourists

In Central India - Sanchi (Budha-stupa), Bimbkheta (10,000

years history), Khajuraho, Mandu, Gwalior, Kanha National Park etc. In Eastern India — exotic Andaman Nicobar, Kolkata, Bhuwaneshwar, Jaganathpuri (Ratha Yatra) etc.

In North-East India - Assam (Guwahati, Kamakhya Temple, Madankamdev temple), Majuli island, Kaziranga National Park etc. In Southern India - Kanyakumari, Badami, Gokarna, Ham Kochi, Madurai, Mamlapuram, Munnar, Waynad etc.

### Mr. Consul, tell us about yourself, please. How you became a diplomat?

I am an Electronics Engineer, graduated from Maharashtra, India. Since joining the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), I had diplomatic assignments in Indian Embassies at Moscow, Yerevan and Chicago. In the Ministry of External Affairs at New Delhi, I worked as Under Secretary (Bhutan) and then as Deputy Secretary (Finance) in the Internal Finance Division. Now, I am here in the one of the most beautiful and unique cities of the world.

Honor in representing your country as Government representative abroad and attraction towards Russia since childhood brought me in diplomatic career. I was connected with Russia due to monthly magazines (Soviet Russia published in Marathi language) in my school-days itself and that to in my hometown 450 kms from Mumbai. My Childhood Russian linkage through literature brought in vernacular language was simply fascinating.

Who are your favorite Russian writers, painters, musicians? I consider Russia as my second home-land and hence I have same brotherly feelings towards all my Russian brothers and sisters. Russian people are very warm, friendly and great in hospitality. India and Russia may be thousands of kms away from each other, but people of both countries are very close in their hearts, we respect each other and share many common values.

Literary works by Leo Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin and Fyodor Dostoyevsky really impressed me. Paintings of Nicholas Roerich, Karl Briullov, Repin and Andrey Rublev mesmerize me. Recently I heard Eduard Khil's songs, I liked the same and felt like listening famous Indian singer Kishor Kumar. Russian chess masters Karpov and Kasparov have special place in my mind.

### Do you like St.-Petersburg? Name, please, the places where you like to go

St. Petersburg is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Who ever sees this city once, falls in love of it. Strelka Vasilievskogo Ostrova is my favorite point in the city, especially on special occasions like Victory day, when lighthouses are lit up. I like St. Isaac Cathedral, Kazan Cathedral as well as Spilled-blood church. You can-not stop appreciating the grand collection at the Hermitage Museum. One should not miss the boat tour of St. Petersburg.

### What is your attitude towards charity?

Happiness increases by sharing. The world and human society have countless problems. One person/city/state/country cannot solve all these problems. However we can take our squirrel's share to make others happy. If we share happiness by fulfilling some needs of the poor people, our happiness multiplies 100 times.

### What could you wish to our readers?

I wish all the best to readers of this magazine. I pray to the God that everybody should get what they desire and wish success in their endeavors. I also appeal to readers to give their best contribution for making the world more peaceful and happy place.



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