

**The mantra of a great country: Indian Ambassador Vinay Kumar spoke about the strategic partnership between our countries**

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**Interview by Mr. Andrey Yashalvsky & Ms. Elizaveta Obolkina**

*Indian Ambassador Vinay Kumar spoke about the state of the strategic partnership between India and Russia.*

*India, a friend of our country, celebrates a major holiday on 15 August — Independence Day. Ahead of the celebrations, Vinay Kumar, India's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Russia, gave an interview to MK, in which he spoke about the state of bilateral relations and their prospects in a wide range of areas.*

**Question: India, as an important trade and economic partner of Russia, faces the threat of secondary sanctions announced by US President Trump. What is New Delhi's position in this situation?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** Our country consistently maintains the view that India's imports from Russia are based on market factors and are carried out with the overall aim of ensuring the energy security of India's 1.4 billion inhabitants.

Furthermore, these imports have strengthened the stability of global energy markets. There are several countries, including the US itself and EU members, that import various types of energy resources from Russia. Thus, US sanctions against India are unfair, unjustified and unreasonable. India will, of course, take all necessary measures to protect its national interests.

**Question: What other challenges do India and Russia face in our complex geopolitical reality?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** The current geopolitical situation is complex. The special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia has stood the test of time and serves the national interests of both countries. India and Russia face the problem of economic imbalances and limited trade diversification. Although defence and energy are significant pillars of economic relations, the total volume of bilateral trade does not realise its potential. We are actively working to diversify trade beyond traditional sectors. Direct air links between India and Russia also remain an area where we need to do better.

Issues of cooperation, market access, joint scientific and technical research and development, and mobility of specialists are important areas of our work.

**Question: Is India ready to act as a mediator in resolving the Ukrainian crisis?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** India advocates peace and supports the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict through political and diplomatic means, through dialogue and diplomacy.

**Question: How would you describe the state of the strategic partnership between India and Russia?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** India and Russia have historically enjoyed strong and mutually beneficial relations, characterised by deep trust and cooperation in various sectors. These ties have grown into a special and privileged strategic partnership that reflects the depth and significance of our bilateral relations.

Our countries are engaged in active contacts aimed at further strengthening cooperation. This is evident in the various summit meetings that contribute to strengthening the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. The Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Russia twice in 2024: to attend the 22nd Annual India-Russia Summit, which took place in Moscow in July 2024, and the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan in October 2024. This year, President Putin will visit India to attend the 23rd annual Russia-India bilateral summit.

The Indo-Russian Intergovernmental Commission (IRIGC) serves as the main governmental mechanism for conducting business between the two countries, covering trade and economic, scientific and technical, and cultural cooperation, as well as military-technical cooperation. It is now important to further strengthen economic cooperation between our countries. Increasing Indian exports to Russia in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture and textiles will help redress the existing trade imbalance. Indian workers can meet Russia's manpower needs and deepen cooperation.

I view the strategic partnership between India and Russia as a strong, multifaceted bilateral relationship covering the political, strategic, security, trade, investment, energy, science and technology, nuclear energy, space, culture, education and humanitarian spheres.

**Question: As far as we know, at the last BRICS summit, an agreement was reached on the further development of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia. What specifically could this entail?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** The concept of a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia means deepening and broadening existing bilateral relations beyond cooperation in traditional areas. This partnership includes several key areas of cooperation with an emphasis on strengthening cooperation in defence, energy, trade and technology, as well as enhancing coordination on global and regional issues.

The Prime Minister of India visited Russia last year. The 2024 BRICS Summit in Russia further strengthened and detailed the practical implications of this partnership. The meeting in Brazil maintained the positive momentum, and the upcoming BRICS summit in India in 2026 will provide our countries with additional platforms to promote their partnership within the broader framework of BRICS, address global challenges and strengthen economic cooperation among BRICS member countries.

As Prime Minister Modi said, "Under India's BRICS presidency, we will work to give BRICS a new resonance. BRICS will mean enhancing resilience and innovation for cooperation and sustainable development. Just as during our G-20 presidency we prioritised the issues of the Global South on the agenda, so too during our BRICS presidency we will take this forum forward in a people-oriented and human-centric manner."

**Question: What specific goals of Russian-Indian cooperation do you consider most important for the coming years?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** Cooperation between India and Russia is extensive and multifaceted. It covers trade, energy, security, strategic interaction and cultural exchange, and all these areas are of considerable importance.

The potential for further growth in Russian-Indian relations is particularly evident in the field of economic cooperation. Our goal is to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030. This goal has been repeatedly confirmed by the leadership of both countries. To address the current trade imbalance, particular attention is being paid to increasing Indian exports to Russia, especially in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture and textiles. The creation of a 'green corridor' for trade and the simplification of customs procedures are key objectives that will facilitate smoother trade flows.

Cooperation in the fight against terrorism, intelligence sharing and cooperation in the field of cybersecurity also remain important tasks for addressing common security challenges.

In addition, the mobility of specialists, especially in the fields of information technology, industry, etc., can meet the demand for labour in Russia and contribute to deeper cooperation. The partnership also opens up great prospects for capacity-building initiatives.

The expansion of transport links will promote tourism and economic cooperation. In particular, the full operation and expansion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will reduce transit times and costs in trade between India, Russia and the Eurasian region, thereby promoting economic integration and regional connectivity.

**Question: India is a huge country with great ethnic and religious diversity. How do you manage to maintain balance between different communities? What difficulties do you encounter in this regard?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** India is known for its enormous diversity. This diversity stems from the profound insights of ancient Indian sages. They realised that all of humanity, as a race, has only one earth to live on. Therefore, they said, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam,' which means, 'The earth is one family.' From this perspective, differences are only in the body, mind and intellect, and this diversity is to be welcomed. The essence of India, beyond its legal framework and academic interpretations, lies in the deep unifying spirit that connects its diverse population.

In the social and political spheres, our constitutional framework, robust democratic system and complex network of legal provisions and social initiatives aimed at promoting equality and protecting minority rights help to maintain the necessary balance in such a diverse society.

India's Constitution, adopted in 1950, guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. This constitutional commitment is reinforced by a parliamentary democracy in which different groups can voice their concerns and participate in governance through elected representatives. In addition, India pursues a policy of affirmative action and recognises cultural and linguistic diversity by encouraging the use of different languages and the establishment of educational institutions by religious and linguistic minorities, thereby reconciling different interests.

Cross-border terrorism, combined with information warfare and disinformation campaigns, poses a serious threat to India. These tactics are designed to sow discord and divide the population, undermining national cohesion and stability. The Pahalgam terrorist attack was one such attempt, and India proved its unity in diversity. However, such challenges cannot be taken lightly — they must be completely eliminated.

Since India's spiritual power is so great, we are confident that we will not only defeat terrorism, but also bring the achievements of Indian civilisation to the whole world. Yoga, Vedanta, Ayurveda, Siddha, etc. will continue to benefit more and more people around the world.

**Question: How are relations between India and Pakistan developing today, after the armed incidents in May 2025?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** India is interested in good relations with all its neighbours. Pakistan's support for cross-border terrorism has become a source of irritation in India-Pakistan relations. Our current policy is that terror and talks cannot go on simultaneously.

Cross-border terrorism will elicit a commensurate and resolute response, which will move from mere condemnation to direct action. This became evident immediately after the Pahalgam attack, when India launched targeted strikes against suspected militant launch sites.

It is also clear to us that India will not succumb to nuclear blackmail, which Pakistan has long been interested in. This demonstrates our determination to act against terrorism regardless of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

Furthermore, our policy emphasises that 'blood and water cannot flow together' and that terrorism and peaceful bilateral relations are incompatible.

India has come a long way since independence. What is your country like today?

India, the world's largest democracy, is a dynamically developing country characterised by significant achievements in various sectors, a rich cultural palette and growing global influence.

As the world's fourth largest economy with a GDP of US\$4.2 trillion, India is a global leader in technology and innovation thanks to its thriving IT sector and significant contributions to space exploration.

Key initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana have enabled millions of people to access financial services and credit. More than 531.4 million beneficiaries have availed themselves of banking services under this initiative since its inception. In addition, the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana programme offers comprehensive health insurance for vulnerable sections of the population, ensuring access to quality healthcare. India's healthcare system is so reliable and affordable that India has become a global hub for medical services. In 2024, we issued 463,725 visas for medical travel.

The Make in India initiative continues to stimulate domestic production and create jobs, promoting economic independence. Such initiatives, combined with our talented youth, create an ecosystem of ideas and innovation. As of September 2024, India has the third largest startup ecosystem in the world.

The story of Digital India, especially the UPI payment mechanism, has also attracted worldwide attention. In June 2025 alone, payments worth over ₹240.3 billion were processed, with 18.4 billion transactions. (Unified Payments Interface is a real-time payment system in India that allows instant money transfers between bank accounts using a mobile device. It allows users to link multiple bank accounts.)

Modern digital India strives to improve the situation of all segments of society and move India towards a bright future. Modern India has a mantra, 'Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi,' which means 'we support development as well as heritage.'

**Question: India is becoming an increasingly confident space power, and we are pleased to remember that our country participated in India's first steps in space, namely in the flight of the first Indian cosmonaut, Rakesh Sharma, in 1984. Is there potential for Russian-Indian cooperation in space today?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** The Indian space programme has achieved significant successes, including the Mars Orbiter (Mangalyaan) mission, which made India the first Asian country to reach Mars orbit on its first attempt. It also successfully landed Chandrayaan-3 near the South Pole of the Moon, a world first, and developed the reliable PSLV launch vehicle for numerous satellite launches.

As you mentioned, the historic cooperation exemplified by Rakesh Sharma's flight on the Soviet spacecraft Soyuz T-11 in 1984 as part of the Intercosmos programme laid a solid foundation for India-Russia cooperation in space.

Recently, Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, a distinguished pilot of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and astronaut (gaganyatri) of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), became the first Indian astronaut to visit the International Space Station (ISS) and the second Indian to go into space after Rakesh Sharma. Shukla's flight into space was an important milestone in the development of India's space ambitions. His year-long training in Russia was a decisive step on the path to becoming an astronaut.

India and Russia continue to explore and engage in various areas of space cooperation, building on their historical ties. There is significant potential in areas such as human spaceflight, satellite navigation and deep space exploration.

**Question: How is people-to-people diplomacy developing between our countries?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** Historically, India and the Soviet Union have had deep and multifaceted relations that went beyond state-level diplomacy and included active cultural, educational and academic exchanges. Russian literary figures such as Alexander Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy resonated with Indian audiences, while Indian thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore attracted the attention of Russians.

Thousands of Indian students received higher education at Soviet universities, and such masterpieces of Indian cinema as *The Tramp* and *The Disco Dancer* gained considerable popularity in the USSR, contributing to mutual understanding and cultural sympathy. The success of the Indian Film Festival, which we organised last December in Moscow and St. Petersburg, demonstrated how much our Russian friends love Indian cinema. This year, the Indian Film Festival will be even bigger and will cover Kazan, Yakutia and Vladivostok over a period of 10 days in October.

Russians' interest in Indian spiritual practices such as yoga and Ayurveda also continues to grow significantly. This year, more than 7,000 people took part in the celebration of International Yoga Day, organised by the embassy throughout Russia. In addition,

Russia is becoming an increasingly popular destination for Indian tourists, while India continues to attract Russian travellers, especially to Goa and Kerala. Russians' interest in India and their appreciation of its vibrant culture are evident. The Indian Embassy, in collaboration with the Moscow government, recently held a nine-day festival called Bharat Utsav from 5 to 13 July, which was attended by over 850,000 people — a true celebration of the close ties between our peoples!

I would also like to mention the Indian dance competition 'Nritya Manjari: All-Russian Indian Dance Competition,' in which 80 performers from different regions of Russia — Samara, Nizhny Novgorod, Buryatia, Kazan and others — took part in 2024. This year, during the second competition, we received applications from more than 160 participants from different parts of Russia. And then there is the first international conference dedicated to the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, Indian Culture Days in Samara, the Tatarstan-India Forum to be held in Kazan, and much more.

This is truly a large-scale collaboration! I believe that relations between India and Russia are actively developing, and cultural programmes such as these are an excellent way to maintain this momentum.

**Question: You mentioned the widespread popularity of yoga. We have a personal question. Could you share with us whether you have a favourite yoga asana?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** You know, yoga is a science that allows you to know yourself. Strength, power, energy — no matter how we use these different words, because life is something that lies beyond words. As long as this strength, this energy exists, we are alive, we breathe, and when it leaves, we are no longer here.

So it is a process of self-discovery. That is the ultimate goal. And masters, seers have said that there are certain things that need to be done. Asana is one of them. Asana is how you sit, for example, if you work in an office, you cannot sit on a table, you must sit on a chair, put your papers down and work like that. This is the asana in which you work. When a doctor performs an operation, this is asana, he stands and does his job. So, for this exploration of yourself, of your life, there are different postures in which you must be. The general criterion is that it should be stable and comfortable.

That is, you cannot do yoga while in an unstable or uncomfortable state. Therefore, there are various yoga asanas that are taught by masters, and it also depends on the condition of the body.

Certain asanas are recommended for certain body types, and depending on this, there are certain times when they should not be done. So I practised different asanas that the master taught me, and I wouldn't say that I have a favourite. But it depends on what the master advised you to do, and whatever the yoga teacher, yoga master, or guru tells you to do is what you should do!

The only criterion for us is that it should be stable, immovable, and comfortable. It must be comfortable because you will have to sit in this pose for a long time, at least an hour or even more. Therefore, it must be comfortable, only then will you be able to do other things that are part of the yoga system.

**Question: What makes Russia attractive to Indian citizens? And how do Indians perceive our country?**

**H.E. Vinay Kumar:** There are two or even three very important aspects to Indian-Russian relations, especially when viewed from the Indian perspective. The first is that since India gained independence, Russia has been a very important partner in India's defence policy, as well as in its industrial policy, particularly in heavy industry.

Therefore, people view Russia very favourably as a country that supported India during conflicts and also contributed to India's industrial growth, heavy engineering, steel production, and so on. The second dimension is the cultural ties that some Indian filmmakers have established with Russia. Raj Kapoor is a well-known name in India, and Russian artists have participated in some of his films. In the past, there were various government programmes for cultural exchange and museum specialists. The Russian circus has visited India several times. And, of course, India has contributed to the Russian circus, including by donating elephants, which have traditionally been part of the Russian circus. The third dimension, which has emerged quite recently, is that many Indians come to Russia to study at Russian educational institutions, mainly in the field of medicine. So if you take these three things together, Russia was a friend during the war and conflicts, Russia contributed to industrial and economic partnership, as well as to culture and people-to-people relations.

Last year, I saw a survey in which more than 80% of respondents viewed Russia as a friend or ally. And that doesn't surprise me.

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