

## Ambassador's Interview to the Astana Times

The Astana Times, a local English language newspaper, carried Ambassador's interview on 6th February, 2017. The text of the interview is reproduced below:

**Q 1. Could you start off with a few comments about the 68<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India that you celebrated in Astana past week? What has been the highlight of the relations in the last year?**

The Republic Day is celebrated in India to commemorate the date on which the Constitution of India came into force on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1950 and India became a Republic. The Embassy organized a flag hoisting ceremony in the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 at the Embassy premises in Astana and hosted a Reception at Hotel Radisson in the evening of 27th January. Around 300 guests including Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations accredited to Kazakhstan, senior Government officials, journalists, representatives of academic and cultural institutions, members of the Indian community and ITEC and ICCR alumni attended the reception.

The Government of Kazakhstan was represented by H.E. Mr. Kanat Bozumbayev, Minister of Energy and Co-Chair of the India-Kazakhstan Intergovernmental Commission as the Chief Guest. In his speech, Minister Bozumbayev congratulated the people of India on the Republic Day and 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

I used the occasion to highlight the achievements of India and progress made in the bilateral relations with Kazakhstan in the last one year. I congratulated the people of Kazakhstan on 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence and achievements made by it in the last 25 years including its membership of UN Security Council. A short documentary on a day of life in modern India was screened on the occasion followed by an Indian classical dance performance by Ms. Akmaral Kainazarova, the honoured artist of Kazakhstan.

The bilateral relations last year focused on building the momentum generated by the visit of India's Prime Minister to Kazakhstan in July 2015. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Nazarbayev met briefly in April in Washington and again in June 2016 in Tashkent. The Chief Minister of one of our most dynamic states, Andhra Pradesh, visited Kazakhstan in July and Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan H.E. Mr. Akylbek Kamaldinov attended the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference held in the month of December in Amritsar in India. India supported Kazakhstan's candidature for the non-permanent membership of the UNSC at the elections held in June 2016. A large number of academic, cultural, defence and business delegations exchanged visits during the year. India signed contract for participation in Astana Expo during the visit of Commissioner H.E. Mr. Rapil Zhoshybayev to New Delhi last February and the Joint Feasibility Study for a free trade agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union was completed in September.

Among other highlights, the Centre of Indian Classical Dances in Almaty celebrated its tenth anniversary in March, the two countries held the first joint military exercise, Prabal Dostyk, in September, India organized festival of India in four cities in Kazakhstan in the month of October, and the fourth India-Central Asia Dialogue was held in New Delhi in

December.

**Q 2. As we all know, India is a very attractive tourist destination for Kazakh citizens, especially Goa. But as of today, there are not convenient flights, to say for instance, Goa. Is there any progress in that direction?**

Goa is one of the main tourist destination in India for Kazakhstani citizens. Though there is no direct flight to Goa from Kazakhstan, there is a daily flight from Almaty to New Delhi, which is well connected to Goa. Airport in New Delhi is also very well connected to other major tourist destinations in India. In addition, a chartered flight 'Sunday Airlines' flies once a week during the tourist season (Oct-March) directly from Almaty to Goa, which carries about 70-80 passengers per flight. There is a provision for upto 10 direct flights per week from Kazakhstan to Goa under the India-Kazakhstan bilateral air services agreement. If the number of Kazakhstani tourists rise, it should become possible to launch a regular flight to Goa, particularly during the Goa tourist season.

I may add that Indian civil aviation sector is growing rapidly with a lot of new capacity addition expected in the next few years. It would substantially improve air connectivity within India.

**Q 3. We had already spoken about EXPO and India's role last year, and that it was among the first countries to confirm participation. Could you update on the progress of your country's pavilion construction? Basically, anything new happening on your part?**

The Indian Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO) is the nodal agency responsible for India's participation in the EXPO. It is in regular contact with the EXPO organizers and has discussed various aspects relating to the concept and design of India Pavilion. The construction of the pavilion as well as commercial area allocated for other activities, such as catering, handicraft showrooms etc. is expected to commence by end of this month. The Embassy is also planning India's national day celebration (70th anniversary of India's independence on 15th August 2017), holding of 3rd International Day of Yoga and several other cultural activities at the Expo.

**Q 4. Is EXPO popular in India? What do people in India know about the upcoming exhibition in Astana? Do you think it will attract a tourist flow from India?**

The announcement of India's participation in Astana EXPO had attracted a lot of media attention in India. People in India have a lot of curiosity about the theme of the Expo and the city of Astana. India's participation in the SCO Summit that is going to be held on the eve of the opening of Astana Expo, would provide further publicity to the Expo in India. If it is marketed well by the tourist operators and a simplified visa and registration procedure introduced for visitors to EXPO, it may attract a large number of Indian tourists.

**Q 5. This year is going into 3<sup>rd</sup> year of your mission in Kazakhstan. You have probably travelled to some places. Where would you take your delegations first in Kazakhstan? Could you share some of your thoughts about Kazakhstan, its progress, new reforms as now, you have more experience and knowledge about the country and its culture?**

Yes, this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of my assignment in Kazakhstan. I have travelled to several

parts of the country including Almaty, Aktobe, Semey, Ust Kamenogorsk, Atyrau and Temirtau and plan to visit few more cities in the next few months. I have also visited places of tourist interest like Borovoe, Charyn Canyon and Tamagaly Tas. All the places have their own charm and beauty.

Kazakhstan is a beautiful country. It has a small population but rich culture. Given our historical linkages, it has a lot of cultural similarities with India. The country has made an impressive socio-economic progress in the last 25 years and has taken several regional and international initiatives that have enhanced its international standing and prestige.

I am impressed by the way the leader of the nation President Nazarbayev has developed a vision for the country and that vision is being implemented through well conceived practical strategies. The economic policy “Nurly Zhol”, “The Plan of the Nation” and the recent announcement to redistribute powers among various branches of the government, would put Kazakhstan on a new stage of economic development and progress, modernization, political democracy and prosperity. Kazakhstan is making wise investments in human capital too that would pay it rich dividends in future.

**Q 6. At the end, could you enlighten our readers on some upcoming events or plans of your mission in Kazakhstan ?**

India’s participation in the SCO Summit and EXPO are obviously going to be major activities in the 2017 calendar. Major Indian companies in green and renewable energy sector would be showcasing their achievements and projects at Expo.

We plan to organize meetings of several bilateral organizers, including the Inter-Governmental Commission during the year to strengthen and further expand mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.

We will organize a series of activities dedicated to the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in Kazakhstan as well as India. The first such series of events would be a mixed Indian and Kazakh cultural performance by Centre of Indian Classical Dances (based in Almaty) on March 11 in Almaty, on March 25 in Chennai and on March 28, 29 and 31 in New Delhi.

India would be celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017 at the Astana Expo. We will also celebrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Day of Yoga at in Astana, Almaty, Atyrau and Karaganda.

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