

**Interview with Ambassador H.E. Mr. Raj Kumar Srivastava in Večernji List newspapers (printed version). Published: 14/08/2021 Journalist: Mr. Hassan Haidab Diab. On the subject AmritMahotsav, India's future prospects, Croatia-India partnership potential and India's increasing profile in global affairs.**

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# RAJ KUMAR SRIVASTAVA

**INDIJSKI VELEPOSLANIK U HRVATSKOJ GOVORI O PROSLAVI DANA NEOVISNOSTI INDIJE, BORBI TE ZEMLJE S KORONAVIRUSOM, INDIJSKIM RADNICIMA U HRVATSKOJ...**

## Očekujem više mogućnosti za zapošljavanje kvalificiranih radnika iz Indije u Hrvatskoj



**Razgovor: Hassan Haidab Diab**

**P**ričekujem više mogućnosti za zapošljavanje kvalificiranih radnika iz Indije u Hrvatskoj. Ovo je jedna od stvari na koje sam se najviše osredotočio u svojoj izjavi u Hrvatskoj. U ovom trenutku, Hrvatska ima veliku potrebu za kvalificiranim radnicima, posebno u područjima poput tehnologije, inženjeringa i medicinske službe. Indija ima veliki potencijal za ispunjavanje ove potrebe, posebno u područjima poput tehnologije i inženjeringa.

**Indija nam je u ovom trenutku jedna od najbržih zemalja u svijetu, posebno u područjima poput tehnologije i inženjeringa. Ovo je jedna od stvari na koje sam se najviše osredotočio u svojoj izjavi u Hrvatskoj.**

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## Usredotočeni smo na digitalno, do kraja godine stvorit ćemo startup most između dvije zemlje

1. On August 15, India celebrates the 75th anniversary of Independence. Where is India standing today in the world - politically, economically, technologically ....?

Answer: This year 15th August is the 75th Independence Day of India and next year in 2022 it would be 75th anniversary of independence. India is celebrating this historic occasion as "Amrit Festival", starting from 12th March 2021 to 15th August 2023 – 75 weeks before upto one year after the 75th anniversary on 15th August 2022. While launching the celebrations on 12th March 2021 at the famous Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat, the land of action of Mahatma Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that this special "Amrit festival" would be celebrated with five pillars - Freedom Struggle, Ideas at 75, Achievements at 75, Actions at 75 and Resolves at 75 – which would inspire the dreams and duties of free India to move forward. In one word to answer your question "where India stands today on its 75th Independence Day politically, economically, technologically", I would say India today stands as a Self-Reliant Pole in the world which is increasingly multipolar. It is a pole that provides regional and global stability and contributes in enhancing peace & prosperity. India treats the world as one family - "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam".

2. How much has the pandemic affected the Indian economy, one of the fastest growing in the world? What is the situation in India with the COVID-19 situation considering that we watched scary scenes coming from your country?

Answer: While India managed the first wave of the pandemic last year extremely well, the second wave this year in April–June period has been tough, mainly due to the sudden peak that it created in terms of number of infections on daily basis. The situation since July has improved and the signs of economic recovery are visible in the Indian economy. The pandemic has affected the whole world, but some sectors of economy have grown disproportionately due to the change in our lifestyles that we had to make due to the pandemic. The digital transformation and healthcare sectors have grown tremendously in India given our natural strength in both these areas prior to the pandemic times. This pandemic has prompted the Indian entrepreneurs and businesses to reinvent themselves and provide solutions to the problems that this pandemic has created. In that context, India's self-reliance has increased including the self-confidence of Indian people. India's vaccine production as well as pharmaceutical supplies have helped more than 80 countries in the world during the first wave last year and first quarter of 2021. In these trying times, Indian start-ups have grown by providing scalable solutions in the areas of Healthcare, FinTech, Digital Transformation and Sustainable Development. Number of unicorns have grown in the last two years in India at the highest growth rate. It is clear indication that the entrepreneurial activity in India has remained resilient.

3. What is the situation today in Kashmir after the war with Pakistan that took place, since India abolished the special status of Kashmir and divided that Himalayan region into two parts, although the decision was expected to meet great resistance in that disputed area with a Muslim majority and might increase tensions with Pakistan?

Answer: Ever since the NDA government assumed office in 2014, it was clear that engagement with Jammu and Kashmir needed a fresh approach – one that widens political participation and makes space for fresh, young and aspirational voices. The situation in the Jammu & Kashmir today after 2 years of the change that the Indian Parliament brought to a temporary provision of the Indian Constitution has proven the purpose with which the change was affected and the purpose was to bring the fruits of development to the people of Jammu & Kashmir which was blocked because of that over 70 years old temporary provision. In these two years, Jammu & Kashmir has seen enormous infrastructure and industrial development, expansion in employment and skill development opportunities, social inclusion, healthcare and education programmes and agriculture & environment related activities. Most importantly we have seen the strengthening of grassroot democracy and peace in Jammu & Kashmir in the last two years. The entire focus of this change was on peoples' inclusive development and their participation in the growth of Jammu & Kashmir.

4. How true are the speculations that the Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata (BJP) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is behind the decision?

Answer: India is the largest democracy in the world today and it is an example for the rest of the world in terms of importance of democratic processes and institutions for inclusive growth with complete involvement of people. Stereotyping Indian political system only creates misinformation and wrong perceptions. To understand a country like India which constitutes 1/6th population of the world, it is important that journalists do not over-simplify and stereotypic political landscape of a country of this size.

5. Does India fear Pakistan could use nuclear weapons if a frontal war breaks out given that Imran Khan has seriously threatened India frequently?

Answer: As I mentioned earlier, India today is a self-reliant pole in the multipolar world enhancing regional & global peace, stability & prosperity. India, therefore, takes actions which fulfill this broad vision that we have in our foreign & security policy.

6. At the end of Donald Trump's term, India signed a military agreement with the USA. Many analysts then saw the deal as a way for India to control Pakistan that would surely strengthen its influence in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan?

Answer: India and USA have a very strong strategic partnership which have become stronger day by day over the period of last two decades. It is a partnership of the people of the two countries and it is a partnership for global public good. Again simplifying such an important strategic partnership points towards the shallowness of perspective which could actually create wrong impression in readers' minds. Every aspect of diplomatic relationship is part of India-USA relationship today and Defence Partnership is one important pillar of this multi dimensional strategic partnership. We are also working together with other like minded countries to provide solutions in the region such as Indo-Pacific. This partnership is not targeted against any country and, therefore, no country needs to be concerned about such a positive partnership. It is to ensure that the peace and stability is provided as the foundation for the prosperity of the people to flourish without fear and uncertainty.

8. What are the relations between India and the United States, Russia and China?

Answer: As I mentioned at the beginning that India@75 is a self-reliant pole in the multipolar world, it is aiming to built partnership with all countries based on mutual interests and, in that context, India maintains good relationships with important countries like USA, Russia, China, EU countries, Japan, Croatia and others. India also has been an active member of plurilateral organizations such as G20 and BRICS where it has provided a constructive agenda and action plan based on India's strengths and competence. As a non-permanent member of UNSC for 2021-22, India has prioritised its focus on three important global challenges of our times – Counter Terrorism, Climate Change & People-centric Globalisation. As a country of enormous size, India has a natural stake in providing solutions to global challenges and there you have examples of India's recent contributions in the form of International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure & International Day of Yoga for example. In doing so, India values its partnership with all countries.

9. The Indian economy has been growing, and is known as the fastest in the world in recent years, with GDP growth of a trillion dollars in the last five years. How do you assess the economic cooperation between Croatia and India?

10. What are the current relations between Croatia and India?

Answer: India is likely to grow at significant rates in the next two decades and there would be opportunities because of this growth with respect to India-Croatia economic engagements. As Croatia also moves into transition phase, from being an Central/Eastern European country to a complete European economy with Schengen and Eurozone entry coming up, there will be new and stronger opportunities for increased Indian and Croatian engagements. These interactions would be based on complementarities and strengths of our two countries and recognizing those we are working towards building further our strong relationship. Croatian technology companies would have great potential to multiply their potential given the vast Indian market and growth. Some companies (about 10) have already made a big exposure to

this opportunity in India. Sure important Indian investments are taking shape in Croatia. Post pandemic, I expect this number to grow as we engage more physically.

11. The President of the Republic of India, Ram Nath Kovind, visited Croatia in March 2019 with a delegation of entrepreneurs. Has anything been realized from what was agreed with former President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović?

Answer: The first ever visit of the president of India to Croatia was an important milestone in our relationship and more such engagements in future would increase the visibility of Croatia in India. Each of these important visits are part of building relationships.

12. Many Indian workers come to work in Croatia. Can we expect even more workers in the future? Apart from finances, what attracted them to come to work in Croatia?

Answer: Our demographic complementarities would definitely create more opportunities for movement of skilled people for mutual benefits. As Croatia has opened this space since January 2021 it would be for Croatian companies to determine what is beneficial in terms of skilled people from India. What we have tried to do is to connect the ecosystems so that Croatian companies can benefit from the skill development revolution that is taking place in India, including with the change of focus in our education policy from degree based education to skill-based education. I am particularly focused on creating new bridges between our education & research institutions for connecting our academic & youth. Currently we have done five new connections in this context, this year so far.

13. An online conference was recently held on the possibilities of technological cooperation at startups between India and Croatia, ie between the Faculty of Electronics and Computing and the Indian Incubator - what is it about?

Answer: Recognizing the potential of innovation ecosystems of the two countries to engage and find mutually beneficial opportunities we have worked in the last 6-8 months to create digital seminars for understanding a way forward for harnessing such opportunities. We hope that by end of this year we would be able to establish India-Croatia start-up bridge to streamline and institutionalize the engagements. India has such a start-up bridge with 11 countries and Croatia could become 12th such country very soon. This will allow start-ups from India to be informed & utilize digital nomad policy in Croatia and Croatian start-ups to scale up their activities given the vast Indian markets. It will also allow cross investment opportunities and most importantly the possibility of co-creation and co-development for solving global problems in third countries. Already some examples of this kind are taking place.

14. Is India and Croatia cooperating culturally?

Answer: Croatia is one country where Indian traditional systems like Yoga and Ayurveda are extremely popular. It is no surprise that International Day of Yoga (21st June) has been celebrated in Croatia for last 7 years since its designation by the United Nations in 2015 and this year in 2021 about 40 events were organized in 40 different locations in Croatia in the month of June. Recognizing this deep interest we have decided to organize an International Yoga and Ayurveda Conference in Zagreb in October 2021 with participation of experts from Croatia, India and other parts of Europe. Similarly, there would be participation by Indian music and dance groups in Rijeka Carnival and Dubrovnik & Split Summer Festivals next year. As we celebrate India@75 in coming two years, we would be organizing innovative events in Croatia bringing two countries culturally together in terms of understanding and sharing the best that we have.

15. How is the power of the IT sector built in India?

Answer: The power of IT sector in India is built on the people of India – the skilled human resources of India. The tradition of mathematics and logic is inbuilt in Indian ancient civilization. One of the most logical language in the world is Sanskrit which is the foundation of many Indian languages. Because of this background there is natural focus on science and engineering in our education system and, therefore, India produces more engineers than anywhere in the world who could easily become IT experts if the opportunities are offered. This is one of the key reasons that people led revolution has taken place in India which is the digital revolution. The Government of India has launched 6 years back Digital India programme to provide the digital infrastructure and training facilities for strengthening this already strong movement so that the big demographic opportunities of India could be converted into a skill based demographic dividend. When we look at 100+ unicorns (the start-ups with over \$1 billion net worth) of India, it is important to realize that the Digital India and Start-up India programmes have contributed strongly into this achievement and this is also an achievement of India@75.

16. How do you spend your time in Croatia? Do you like Croatian food or do you eat only Indian food since there are 4 Indian restaurants in Zagreb?

Answer: Croatia is a beautiful country and there is never a problem in spending time in Croatia. On the contrary, there is lack of time in order to do justice with all you can do in Croatia which would include so many sporting opportunities, a walk in the nature, experimenting with different cuisine options, enjoying the cultural landscape that is offered by different cities and towns of Croatia and most importantly the beautiful and diverse tourism ideas that Croatia offers. Cuisine is indeed an important aspect of cultural promotion and Indian food has done wonders in bringing people of different countries closer to India. I am sure it is a matter of time that there would be more Indian cuisine offers in Croatia in coming months and years, as we move into the post-pandemic world. And of course the best Indian food you would always get at Indian Ambassador's residence.