India was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Ukraine, and this year is the 28th anniversary of the official bilateral relations between our countries. Over the years of independence, Ukraine and India have established cooperation in the defense, political, scientific, technical, economic and cultural spheres. The Indian direction is of priority among the countries of the Asia-Pacific region in the international policy of Ukraine, moreover there is a big advantage in trade balance in favor of Ukraine.
India is the largest trading partner of Ukraine among the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, our trade turnover peaked in 2013 – when it reached 3 billion US dollars, in subsequent years, the volumes of trade turnover decreased significantly and in 2018 this rate was equal to slightly more than 2.3 billion US dollars. What are the prospects for a significant increase in turnover?

Thank you for such an important question. Of course, the relations between our countries largely depend on the political will of the leaders of states, but at the same time they are also determined by economic priorities. And if we are talking about the economic relations between India and Ukraine, then in this aspect, India is the most significant trading partner of Ukraine in the Asia-Pacific region. And, more importantly, Ukraine sells $ 2 billion worth goods to India and buys $ 800 million worth goods, thus the trade balance is in favor of Ukraine. At the same time, the basket of goods supplied is extremely diverse: it varies from basic agricultural raw materials to high-tech engineering products.

India is a large country with the population of more than 1.2 billion people. We consume a lot, including food, and Ukraine, as you know, is the breadbasket of Europe and one of the largest suppliers of food in the world.

As for the Indian export component, of course, first of all the pharmaceutical industry should be highlighted. We are a global manufacturer of pharmaceuticals and provide high quality products at reasonable price, so Indian pharmaceutical manufacturers are quite confident on the Ukrainian pharmaceutical market. I believe this is win-win position for both countries.

In addition to the pharmaceutical segment, I would also like to highlight the automotive and motor industries, in which India takes a prominent place and the products of these industries are being successfully supplied to the Ukrainian market.

That is true that after 2013 there was a decline in Ukrainian-Indian trade, which was caused more by the situation in your country than by any other external factor. Nevertheless, after 2018, we can observe a gradual increase in trade, and following on from the results of 2019, soon it should reach again the number of 3 billion US dollars. The growing confidence of the international community in the increase of economic potential of Ukraine will also contribute in the boosting of the trade turnover. I believe that it is a positive trend. As soon as the investment climate in Ukraine becomes more stable, you can count on a significant increase of investments in your economy.

Last year was the election year for both of the countries. After the formation of new governments, we expect the strengthening of the political dialogue between India and Ukraine. What are your plans for the nearest future in the context of joint official visits and bilateral interstate meetings?

Yes, last year was important from a political point of view for both India and Ukraine. As you probably know, India is the largest democracy in the world. We have been adhering to the democratic vector of development since our independence, for over 70 years. Ukraine, by the way, is also one of the largest democracies in your part of the world, and you also have based your policy on democratic principles since the independence.

As we see, last year the elections in our countries were held without obvious violations, peacefully and very successfully. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, in a telephone conversation had the honor to congratulate President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky on his election as the Head of state. In this context, it can be claimed that the dialogue between India and Ukraine takes place at the highest level. We also have an active dialogue at the ministerial level, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine V. Prystaiko and the Minister of External Affairs of India Mr. S. Jaishankar held a meeting in New York. As the Ambassador of India to Ukraine, I also held a number of meetings with the new government of Ukraine and, in my deep conviction, the years 2020 and 2021 will be significant in the development of bilateral relations between our countries.
How could one briefly characterize the main directions of India’s foreign policy in today’s global environment?

Talking about the foreign policy of India, first of all, we notice the factor of constant international dialogue. We are very balanced in making decisions on the international arena. Constancy and confidence in our capabilities is the strength of our democracy. India is one of the few countries in the world that can sit at one negotiating table with any country of the world. We are accepted because the foreign policy vector of India is constant and does not have double standards. We focus on the prospects for global development in all areas: from climate change to solving the problem of terrorism.

Currently the priority directions in Indian international policy are the development of alternative energy sources: wind power generation, construction of solar power plants, innovations in the energy sector. In the nearest future - the commissioning of a solar electric plants with a capacity of at least 2 gigawatts. This is a great investment and a big step forward. Succeeding in these areas, we are trying to develop green energy in the world.

We are aware of earlier complaints from representatives of the Indian CCI Association that Indian businessmen find it difficult to obtain a visa to Ukraine. What is the situation with the visa regime between our countries now? We know that India issues five-year visas to citizens of several countries.

It is considered that the visa mechanism is a tool that a state uses to encourage citizens of other countries to perform contacts with country more actively. This mechanism directly affects not only tourist flows, but also the development of business areas and intracultural relations.

If this mechanism is simple, then the mutual benefits will be present in the bilateral relations. India issues e-visas for Ukrainian citizens and, as far as I know, Ukraine also has plans to simplify the visa regime with India. But at the moment, Indian citizens have to apply for a Ukrainian visa.

As soon as the Ukrainian side will liberalize the visa regime, a much larger number of Indians will be able to visit Ukraine both for cultural, tourist and business purposes. After all, Ukraine has a good image in Indian society – which has been lasting since the Soviet times.

What are the other difficulties that Indian business faces in our country? What is wrong with the investment climate in Ukraine?

Indian business has a long history of relations with Ukraine, which have been actively developing since the days of the Soviet Union and continue to develop after the independence. Ukraine is not a new market for the Indian business community.

Most representatives of our business community are well aware of all the weaknesses and strengths of the investment climate in Ukraine. And this is one of the reasons why we are important trading partners for each other.

At the same time, of course, we wish the rule of law and investor rights were protected in Ukraine, the banking sector worked transparently, and the situation with corruption was not so neglected.

Nevertheless, we can observe how Ukraine is actively borrowing the funds from abroad, which indicates the confidence of foreign investors, and therefore, the investment climate will certainly improve.

Another positive factor is that Indian investments are actively coming to the pharmaceutical sector; they are visible even to ordinary citizens of Ukraine. Furthermore, investors from India are looking with hope at the agricultural sector of Ukraine, but for the investments to grow in this area it is necessary to establish the transparent rules of the game and it is important to resolve the issue with the land market in Ukraine.

What is the Indian stance on Ukrainian crisis? What were the motives of the Indian side, while abstaining from voting on the resolution of the UN General Assembly on the territorial integrity of Ukraine?

Ukraine is a friend of India, and we were one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Ukraine after the dissolution of the USSR. We have always been supporting the peaceful ways to resolve crises, as well as we understand that the development of a country and people is possible only when people live in peace and harmony.

What are the results of cooperation between the intergovernmental working groups of Ukraine and India? What joint projects can Ukrainian companies offer India?

Currently a number of major government working groups are functioning and coordinating the cooperation between our countries. That includes not only the business, but also cooperation in scientific, industrial, agricultural, defense, cultural and other fields. The last joint meeting of the intergovernmental working groups was back in 2018, and we expect the dialogue to intensify in 2020. Activation is expected primarily within the Indian national program “INVEST INDIA”.

India is widely interested in development of joint projects in the mining and processing sectors, in metallurgy and agriculture, as well as in other large engineering projects.

Talking about the other traditions of our cooperation - once our people used to watch Indian films with pleasure... What is the life of Indian Bollywood today? Why are your films practically not visible at the Ukrainian film distribution? And what are the chances of the reviving Ukrainian cinema and animation in conquering the Indian market?

India is a country of cinema. Indian Bollywood makes over 1000 films annually - these are films not only in Hindi, but also in other official regional languages of India. These films are popular abroad not only because of the large Indian diaspora in other countries, but also because the world can see all the diversity of Indian culture through cinema. This is a kind of image brand recognition project of India abroad.

Bollywood is also known in Ukraine, especially among the older generation. In order to popularize Indian cinema in Ukraine, we need a strong distribution, and it is also important to resolve the issue of dubbing films in Ukrainian. In most countries of the world, films are not dubbed, but only titrated. All these steps require investment. And I believe: as soon as we resolve these issues, Ukrainians will love Indian cinema as many people love it.

The economy of India is growing in average by 6-7% annually – what is the secret of achieving such high results?

You see, the growth is vitally important for Indian economy - we simply have to grow by at least 6% per year. The need is justified by the fact that we are a country with a large and constantly growing population, most of which is young people of the age under 25. Population growth requires a similar increase in jobs and employment, development of infrastructure and health care system, education system and other social programs.

On the other hand, we constantly invest in the development of ports, transport, the energy sector and production. All this implies the need for sustainable economic growth. In addition, we have a huge domestic market: the economically active population exceeds 600 million – this is so-called middle class. We also have a large layer of rich people and an even larger layer of poor people. Each of them has its own function: one produces, the other consumes.
Reforms are another important element of development. Thanks to effective government reforms, India is becoming increasingly competitive on the global stage. One of the most important reforms, which has been successfully implemented, has the conventional name “One country - one tax”. Previously, we had different tax rates on goods in each state and it was difficult to conduct effective pricing when the cost of goods could change significantly on the way from one state to another. Tax collection was also very difficult. Thanks to the reform, everything has changed. Now we plan to reach the second place in the world in terms of GDP.

Today, India has 22 nuclear reactors with a total capacity of 7,000 MW. Recently, in Ukraine, nuclear energy has provided more than 50% of the country’s needs and has a total capacity of just over 13,000 MW. The numbers indicate that we can be useful to each other. Is there any prospect of cooperation between countries in the sphere of nuclear energy?

I admit, it is a surprise for me that Ukraine covers more than 50% of its demand for electricity with nuclear power generation. Despite the fact that we also use nuclear energy, India was not able to achieve such indicators in this direction as Ukraine.

Most of the nuclear reactors in India were designed by Soviet engineers, which is explained by the proximity of our relations, while in the nuclear energy sector we are cooperating both with the Russian Federation and Ukraine, since we understand that Ukraine has accumulated huge scientific potential in this sector. Especially in the field of security. You had a Chernobyl disaster, which has become the great lesson, and you can share the experience. Such an experience is important for any country where nuclear power is developed.

Are Indian airlines ready to launch direct flights to Ukraine?

Flight connection is the most important link in the development of bilateral relations and tourism. Currently, UIA operates direct flights to India, which generally satisfies the demand. Indian airlines are predominantly engaged in the development of domestic flights in India itself - this is a huge market that requires large investments.

I believe that with significant intensification of bilateral relations, Indian airlines will also be interested in entering to the Ukrainian market.

India is predominantly an agricultural country, 17% of your GDP is produced by the agricultural sector, which also provides jobs for 53% of the population. Despite the growth of the economy, the number of hungry people in India is 4.5 times bigger than the population of Ukraine. All the produced agricultural products are used exclusively for personal consumption, and not for export. India is able to buy all our export grain. What are the prospects for cooperation between our countries in the agricultural sector? Import of which agricultural goods groups is interesting for India?

Food security is in a particular priority for India. In addition to grain, great demand is observed for fruits and vegetables, as well as not only for raw materials, but also for finished made from agricultural materials.

Our country also produces a huge amount of agricultural products, and sometimes we collect a fairly large crop, which allows us to cover the vast majority of domestic food needs. At the same time, we expect the demand for fruits and vegetables to be constantly growing. The demand for flowers is also growing.

Through the students who study in Ukraine, India provides Ukraine annually with $ 30 million. What is necessary to provide a qualitative increase in the influx of Indian students into our country?

Ukrainian higher education has been popular among Indians since the days of the USSR, especially in the field of medicine, aviation and engineering. Ukrainian universities have been known for the quality of teaching, but there are certain difficulties in this aspect, since we assess the quality of education through the quality of students’ training and, as a result, how and where students will be employed.

In this context, I would like to recommend you to pay much more attention to the quality of training and innovations in educational processes. Ukrainian universities should also undergo international certification, so that by looking at any institution of higher education, you could immediately understand its place in the international ranking.

Another important aspect is the ability to provide students with good commodities for living, learning and spending their leisure time. Indian students are wealthy students who invest up to $ 30 million annually into Ukrainian economy.

Teaching in English and Russian is also extremely important, because most Indian students are fluent in English, and historically we are culturally connected with Russian-speaking countries. Without teaching in international languages, it is extremely difficult to talk about the growing attractiveness of Ukrainian education among Indian students.

According to our data, 30% of the Indian population has the same balance of purchasing power as the US residents. 30% is 360 million people, which is almost equal to the population of Europe. This is a huge tourist market - what measures could Ukraine undertake to attract it to us?

You know, this is a difficult question. I believe that Ukrainian politics should rethink the prospects and benefits of the potential growth of tourist flow from India to Ukraine. The Indian middle class absolutely outnumbers the EU population.

Moreover, our population has stable purchasing power thanks to a strong national currency. We are an open country and, seeing the potential of Ukraine, we are interested in the development of tourism.

We like your country, its climate and natural potential. You need to advertise Ukraine more on the international level and develop internal infrastructure, making it convenient for foreign guests.

Information about the photos:
1. Ultramodern Egg-shaped building, Mumbai
2. Parliament building
3. Taj Mahal, Agra
4. The main temple of Bahai faith, Lotus temple, Delhi

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