

Ambassador's Live Interview to Kazakh Radio

Ambassador gave a live interview to Kazakh Radio on April 20, 2016. He also responded to questions raised by listeners during the programme. Mr. Bhaskar Ojah played live music on Tabla and flute during the interview. The interview lasted for about 40 minutes. Excerpts from the interview are given below :

Interviewer : Please tell us about yourself and your service.

Ambassador : I am a career diplomat. I joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1993 at the age of 26 years. In the last 23 years, I have worked in Indian Embassies in Moscow, Kiev and Kathmandu, High

Commission of India in London, Consulate General of India in St. Petersburg, and the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. I also represented India as the member of the Executive Committee in the Commonwealth of Nations headquartered in London and the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Communication Technologies in the Context of International Security in 2012-13.

Interviewer : What do you say as a valuable experience while working in our country?

Ambassador : I came to Kazakhstan one and a half years ago. I presented my credentials to President Nazarbayev on December 10, 2014. This is my first assignment as Ambassador. Therefore, every bit of experience that I gain here is immensely valuable. Of course, Kazakhstan is a beautiful country, unique in many ways. It has a large landmass endowed with rich natural resources. It has a small population but rich culture.

Interviewer : What awaits the tourists in your sunny country?

Ambassador : India is incredible. There is a lot in India to meet all kinds of tourist interests. It is dotted with attractive historical sites including 32 world heritage sites for people interested in Indian history and culture. India has several wildlife sanctuaries and botanical gardens for those who have special allure for wild or are interested in flora and fauna. India offers adventure tourism to those who prefer a more challenging holiday like water rafting, paragliding, trekking and mountain climbing.

People who seek spiritual solace can visit pilgrimage sites and meditation centers. For those who prefer beach and sunshine, water sports, scuba diving and snorkeling, India offers serene islands as well as the famous Goa and Kerala beaches with hundreds of miles of long beautiful coastline. To top up, India offers rich diversity of culinary offerings, art, culture, folklore, music, dance, tradition, costumes, handicrafts, fairs and festivals. In the last few years, India has emerged as one of the preferred destinations for medical tourists across the globe for those who want timely healthcare at par with the best available in the world.

Interviewer : What is the status of diaspora in your Republic? How many Kazakh people live in your country?

Ambassador : There are about 60-70 Kazakh citizens living in India. Most of them are students pursuing higher studies in various universities in India under the Government of India scholarship or self-financing schemes. There are also small number of Kazakh women married to Indian citizens and some Kazakh citizens working in India-Kazakh joint ventures operating in India.

Interviewer : What do Kazakh tourists mean for India?

Ambassador : All tourists are precious. Kazakh Tourists are specially valued for their refined tastes and deep interest in India's history and culture. They usually visit Goa, Agra, and ayurvedic, yoga and spiritual centers spread across India. They greatly contribute to promoting cross-cultural relations and friendship between our countries.

Mr. Bhaskar Ojah plays Indian classical music on Tabla, which influenced the next question.

Interviewer : What a nice music! Mr. Ambassador, can you please tell us in brief about this Indian musical instrument called Tabla?

Ambassador : Tabla is a percussion instrument in India which is used practically for all classical music and dance.

Interviewer : What kind of difficulties may Kazakhstani tourists possibly face in producing documents while applying for Indian visas?

Ambassador : Kazakhstani tourists travelling to India on an ordinary passport require tourist visa. In Kazakhstan, the visas may be obtained either at the Indian Embassy in Astana or its Representative office in Almaty. The visa issuance system for Kazakh citizens is quite liberal and user friendly, requiring minimal documentation. For a tourist visa, all that is required is online submission of application form, followed by a visit to the Indian Mission along with the printed application form, one photograph, a copy of flight booking and requisite fees. Visas are usually issued either the same day or the next day.

Interviewer : Can you name three tourist destinations in India that should be visited by Kazakhstani tourists on priority?

Ambassador : India offers a variety of attractions to cater to the specific tastes of the Kazakh tourists. However, for a beginner, I would recommend Goa and the Golden triangle connecting Delhi, Agra and Jaipur.

Telephone calls were received from listeners. **Listener No.1 :** My name is Ms. Aigul. I am from Astana. I am planning to visit India with my aunt in August. Is it necessary for a woman up to 35 years of age to submit a letter of permission from her father, mother or husband while applying for tourist visa?

Ambassador : It is required as of now. However, if the applicant has any difficulty in getting such a letter, she may be exempted from producing it after being interviewed by the Consular Officer.

Listener No. 2 : I am Mr. Kudaibergen from Almaty city. How could India produce brilliant specialists in IT in such a short period of time?

Ambassador : Thank you very much for the question. India started paying high priority and attention to IT in the 1980s and established several colleges and institutions in this field. It also introduced IT in the existing colleges where such a discipline did not exist earlier. This helped India to develop a cadre of IT specialists which allowed this industry to flourish in India as well as provide such specialists to other countries.

Interviewer : Which country's citizens make the largest tourist inflow to India? What is the ranking of tourist arrivals from Kazakhstan?

Ambassador : The largest tourist inflow to India came from United States followed by Bangladesh, United Kingdom, Sri Lanka and Russia. In total, 8 million tourists visited India in 2015. Kazakhstan ranks fifty eight in the number of tourists visiting India.

Interviewer : What are the big festivals and holidays in 2016, which may attract tourists to India?

Ambassador : A large number of festivals and holidays are celebrated in India with great fervor and enthusiasm. Some of the festivals are celebrated all over India, while others only in specific parts of the country. The three biggest festivals are Holi, Dussehara and Diwali. Holi is the festival of colours. It normally falls in the month of March. Dussehara and Diwali are the festivals of victory of good over evil and family re-union. They normally fall in October-November. Among other religious festivals, Hindus celebrate Shiv Ratri, Ram Navami and Janmashtami; Muslims celebrate Id and Birthday of Prophet Mohammad; Christians celebrate Christmas day; Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak's Birthday; Buddhists celebrate Budha Purnima; Zoroastrian and Bahai communities celebrate Nauryz festival; and Jains celebrate Mahavir Jayanti, the birthday of the 24th Tirthankar, which is today. Among regional festivals, the biggest and most spectacular are Rath Yatra festival in Puri, Camel fair in Pushkar, and Kumbh Mela held in Allahabad, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain by rotation. The Kumbh Mela is the world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims. India celebrates three national days, the Republic Day on 26th January, the Independence Day on 15th August and Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary on 2nd October.

Interviewer : We would like to know the statistics of tourism. How many Kazakhstanis spent their holidays in your country in 2015?

Ambassador : 16,000 Kazakhstani tourists visited India in 2015 and 17,000 visited in 2014.

Interviewer : Mr. Ambassador, we would like to know what brings our countries closer?

Ambassador : The relations between India and Kazakhstan are deep-rooted and historical. They can be characterized as being civilizational in scope and content. The relations date back to at least 2500 years ago when members of the Saka tribes traveled and assimilated in India. Since then, there has been a constant exchange of goods and ideas between the two countries with Buddhism travelling from India to Central Asia and Sufism from Central Asia to India through the teachings of Khwaja Ahmed Yassawi. The illustrious Mughal dynasty founded by Babur in India included some very farsighted and visionary rulers and patrons of arts like Akbar and Shahjahan. They immensely contributed to the Indian culture and civilization. The influence of Central Asian art, culture, architecture and even cuisine can be easily seen in the Indian art, culture, architecture and cuisine. More recently, in the last five to six decades, we have seen the reverse flow of the cultural influences from India through the popularity of Indian films, culture, dance, music and yoga in Kazakhstan. The Indian film stars Raj Kapur and Mithun Chakraborty, as well as TV serials, Madhubala and Kelin are as popular in Kazakhstan as they are in India.

At political level, the visit of the first Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi to Kazakhstan in 1955 made a deep imprint in the minds of the people of Kazakhstan. Many girls born in Kazakhstan following this visit were named Indira, which has become a popular name in Kazakhstan today. A vivid testimony of our close relations is the fact that President Nazarbayev chose India to be the first foreign country outside CIS to visit in February, 1992 after Kazakhstan attained independence in December, 1991. Our relations have steadily grown since then. India has been a consistent supporter of Kazakhstan's initiative on Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia and Kazakhstan supports India's permanent membership of UNSC. One of the first major foreign investments in Kazakhstan came from a prominent Indian businessman Mr. Lakshmi Mittal. Today, Kazakhstan is India's largest trade and investment partner in Central Asia. The recent visit by our Prime Minister to Kazakhstan has further strengthened these relations and opened new areas of cooperation.

Listener No. 3: My name is Ms. Aigul. I am from Atyrau. Indian movies are highly popular in your country. And we, Kazakhstani people like Indian movies. We watch Indian films on TV regularly. My question is how India teaches and develops such actors and actresses? And one more question: How can I travel to India as I would like to visit the country.

Ambassador : There is a commercial dynamics of preparing the actors and actresses. There are reputed institutions in India which teach people in the art of acting. They produce actors and actresses for the film industry. Air Astana operates daily flights between Almaty and New Delhi. It takes 3½ hours to fly between Almaty and Delhi. The flight leaves Almaty at 7.55 AM and reaches New Delhi at 11.10 AM and the return flight starts from New Delhi at 12.20 PM and arrives in Almaty at 4.35 PM.

Interviewer : What is the feature in the people of India that specially attracts tourists?

Ambassador : People in India are freedom and fun loving. They love to interact with other people. A wide diversity of culture, religions and languages in India makes Indians very open-minded and adaptable. They adjust easily and mingle freely with people from diverse backgrounds. Guests particularly have a special place in India, embedded in its tradition, Athithi Devo Bhava' meaning Guest is God'.

Interviewer : Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador for this informative and interesting interview.

Ambassador : I wish all the listeners of this programme good health, happiness and prosperity. I extend my congratulations to all people of Kazakhstan on the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence this year.

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