



Czech Foreign Minister Tomas Petricek.

Underpinned by historical linkages and growing economic synergies, India's relations with the Czech Republic are steadily moving onto a higher trajectory. In this wide-ranging conversation with Manish Chand, Editor-in-Chief, *India and World* magazine, Czech Foreign Minister Tomas Petricek unveils plans to intensify India-Czech strategic and economic partnership across the spectrum.

Speaking to *India and World* on the sidelines of the 2020 Raisina Dialogue, organised by India's Ministry of External Affairs and ORF, Mr Petricek struck an upbeat note on India's rise as a global power and expressed confidence that the two countries will proactively partner to shape the emerging multi-polar world. *(Excerpts from the interview)*

India is a natural partner: Czech Foreign Minister

Q) How do you look at the current play of India's relations with the Czech Republic?

A) Let me just stress that my country has a long tradition of good friendly relations with India going back to first half of the last century. Our cooperation has always been based on very good business and economic cooperation. However, we feel that it is time also for us as countries that are democracies and share similar values to strengthen our political relations because we are facing many challenges at the moment on account of global issues like climate change and international terrorism. The key issue is how to use new technologies to provide an appropriate framework to resolve these issues to benefit people. In this regard, my country feels that India

is a natural partner for us, a strategic partner in Asia and we would like to elevate and intensify our contacts with India.

At the same time, we feel that the Czech Republic, as a part of the European Union, should advocate closer cooperation between the EU and India. I think that this is the right moment where Europe and India can come together. Our interest in many areas are converging and meeting. We share same values regarding a rules-based international order. We also need to tackle some of the biggest challenges ahead of us like climate change and issues relating to social progress, modernisation of our economies and ensuring a decent life to our people.

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Q) How do you look at India's rise as a key global player and an emerging power? What are the Czech Republic's expectations from India as a global player?

A) Our societies are based on similar values; we are democratic societies; we protect human rights; and our societies support the rule of law. There is a strong convergence of values. We can naturally become allies, shaping the world we live in. It is great to hear about the Indian perspective and about India's future role in a multipolar world where no single power will be able to provide global public services, including security.

Going forward, I expect that India as a responsible global power will be our partner and our ally in many areas. That's why we will like to engage more.

Q) What's the Czech Republic's stand on Indian membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group? How do you look at prospects of cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy between India & the Czech Republic?

A) On this issue, we are on the same page. My country is also exploring the possibility of peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy. We see it as a part of a possible solution to make our economy carbon-neutral. For example, we are



India's President Ramnath Kovind with his Czech counterpart Milos Zeman in Prague.

learning to gradually phase out the use of coal in our energy mix. India is also planning reduce to use coal less.

Both countries are looking at a low-carbon future. And nuclear energy is a viable solution to achieve this goal. In this regard, I think there is also a possibility of exploring future commercial and business partnerships because both countries have robust industry in this field.

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Q) You spoke about the need to expand relations between India and the EU. One of the transformative steps that still needs to be taken is the signing of the broad-based trade and investment treaty, which is still stuck because of long-standing differences. What can the Czech Republic do to expedite the India-EU FTA deal?

A) Czechia supports free trade. Free trade, in the long term, provides prosperity for all participating sides. However, I think it is right to be sensitive to some particular circumstances of our partners. During the negotiations, we need to address concerns of India when it comes to trade relations with EU. We should acknowledge the need of the Indian economy to modernise, India still needs to tackle a lot of issues for this deal to happen.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his Czech counterpart Tomas Petricek.