



"Navigating the Diplomatic Maze: Unraveling India's Geopolitical Positioning and Global Challenges"

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Balancing Act in a Shifting World: An insight on Economic Diplomacy, Security Concerns & Navigating Global Challenges

Intro: This week on Socio-economic Voice, embarking on the complex tapestry of global diplomacy, we delve into an insightful conversation with **Dr. Mohan Kumar, Former Ambassador to France.** The current Dean and Professor of Diplomatic Practice, O.P. Jindal Global University and an eminent figure in the realm of international relations, Dr Kumar speaks to **senior journalist Mahima Sharma.** In this exclusive dialogue at Indiastat, we explore the intricate challenges and strategic opportunities that India faces amid a shifting geopolitical landscape, gaining profound insights into the delicate dance of nations.

MS: What are the key diplomatic challenges and opportunities India faces in the current geopolitical scenario? How can India strategically position itself in the evolving global order, considering the geopolitical shifts and the rise of new powers?

Dr. Kumar: India actually finds itself in a geopolitical sweet spot for a variety of reasons. This offers a number of opportunities which can be smartly exploited by us. The challenges are mainly economic in nature: how to lift millions of people out of poverty and how to achieve inclusive economic growth. During the war in Ukraine, India has done a remarkable job of tightrope walking without sacrificing any of its vital national interests. On Gaza, we have followed a dual track approach: bilaterally we have supported Israel in view of our close ties. At the UN and elsewhere, we have articulated our traditional support for Palestinian aspirations including the two-state solution.

Coming to the second part, China is now the most important threat for India and we have no choice but to resort to "external balancing" (for instance via the QUAD) to counter this threat. On the Ladakh matter, we need to keep our troops there for as long as it is necessary.

MS: From your perspective, what are the major security concerns globally, and how should nations collaborate to address them effectively?

Dr Kumar: Terrorism continues to be a major threat both on land and at sea. Cyber security is a major non-traditional threat. And in many ways, even climate change is a serious non-traditional threat. Multilateral cooperation is required to tackle each.

MS: In the context of economic diplomacy, how can India further strengthen their trade and investment partnerships for mutual benefit? Please answer this with a vision towards the next decade 2024 onwards.

Dr Kumar: The future of economic diplomacy for India lies in concluding Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the EU, UK and the GCC. The future of the MFN-based multilateral trading system (WTO) is uncertain. India must also be

part of the resilient value chains for critical minerals and get access to the state of art technology.

MS: Given the enduring humanitarian consequences of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, can you suggest international diplomatic initiatives that could be more impactful in resolving the Israel-Gaza conflict? Additionally, drawing from your experience, what diplomatic approaches are vital in addressing global challenges like the Russia-Ukraine conflict to prevent the escalation to a third world war?

Dr Kumar: Whether it is the war in Ukraine or the conflict in Gaza, ultimately a diplomatic solution must be found. But for that to happen, both parties to the conflict must want a peaceful solution. This point has not been reached in either of the two conflicts going on in two different parts of the world. It is for the UN Security Council to ensure that a third world war does not break out.

MS: The strained relationships put a pause to optimistic negotiations about an Indo-Canadian trade deal, almost set to be clinched later in 2023; other concerns include hardships for Indian students in Canada. What could be the ideal solution to this far-impacting tension?

Dr Kumar: The best approach to the Indo-Canadian problem is quiet backchannel talks, which I believe is happening.

MS: How can nations navigate the complexities of the digital age to foster positive diplomatic relations and address misinformation?

Dr Kumar: Digital diplomacy is already being resorted to by countries. Fact checking is essential to avoid falling into the trap of any and every kind of disinformation.

MS: Considering the global humanitarian challenges, how can nations integrate humanitarian diplomacy into their foreign policy to address issues like refugee crises and health pandemics?

Dr Kumar: The United Nations High Commission of Refugees is doing stellar work in regard to humanitarian work. Diplomacy must be empathetic, humane and kind - but this is easier said than done.

MS: What's the takeaway from your second book - Changing Power Equations Around the World - India's Moment?

Dr Kumar: Main take away from my Book: India's transformation from a balancing power to a leading power has begun as evidenced by the successful holding of the G20 Summit. The crucial imperative is to become a 10 Trillion Dollar economy with inclusive economic growth.

MS: Last question is for our student readers: Diplomacy often involves navigating between idealistic goals and practical realities. How can future diplomats strike a balance between idealism and realism in their work?

Dr Kumar: It is difficult to strike a balance between idealism and realism. The famous Kissinger, who died recently, is the best example of how diplomats are only guided by realpolitik. But at the end of the day, diplomacy will last only if it is also ethical. Kissinger himself realized this when he emphasized not just power but also legitimacy!

About Dr Mohan Kumar

Ambassador [Dr Mohan Kumar](#) spent over 36 years in the Indian Foreign Service ending his career as India's Ambassador to France based in Paris. Since his retirement in 2017, he has been a full time academic as Dean and Professor of Diplomatic Practice at O.P. Jindal Global University. His book "India's Moment" has just been released and is published by HarperCollins.

About the Interviewer

Mahima Sharma is an Independent Journalist based in Delhi NCR. She has been in the field of TV, Print & Online Journalism since 2005 and previously an additional three years in allied media. In her span of work she has been associated with CNN-News18, ANI - Asian News International (A collaboration with Reuters), Voice of India, Hindustan Times and various other top media brands of their times. In recent times, she has diversified her work as a Digital Media Marketing Consultant & Content Strategist as well. Starting March 2021, she is also a pan-India Entrepreneurship Education Mentor at Women Will - An Entrepreneurship Program by Google in Collaboration with SHEROES. Mahima can be reached at media@indiastat.com

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