



The U.S. law that aims to sanction countries that conduct energy and defence trade with Russia, is "hypocritical", Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic says, while urging that India and Serbia should revive ties from the Non-Alignment era.

India and Serbia are celebrating their 70th year of cooperation. While ties are old, they are not very deep at present. What do you expect from ties this year?

We are very proud of our long-standing mutual relations, but they are not as well developed as in the past. My mission is to reconnect our two countries, to have political consultations at the highest level and support each other at the international level and also to seek other areas of cooperation like in the areas of economy, education, medicine, film industry, and in the field of defence. Serbia by size is not a large country; by population it is smaller than New Delhi! But we are great friends. In Belgrade, Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, and Indira Gandhi are remembered well, and have streets named after them. Tito and Nehru were the founding members of the Non Aligned Movement that was launched in Belgrade. I am the leader of the party President Tito once led and his grandson is a member of Parliament from my party. So I have a personal stake in developing this relation as a part of this legacy.

Hasn't the Non Aligned movement also lost its relevance today?

Following Tito's death came the break-up of Yugoslavia, as he had been integral to its unity. Today Serbia is the successor to Yugoslavia, but we have lost a lot of time, the deaths of so many people since then. Some, primarily Western countries, weren't satisfied even then, and pushed for the declaration of Kosovo, a province of Serbia as an independent country. As a result, Serbia has been compelled to focus on its domestic problems, not its foreign policy. As for NAM, its membership still forms a big bloc in the United Nations, but because of the fall of the Soviet bloc and the rise of a unipolar world, it too has lost its way. Today, NAM needs a new cause, and big leaders like we had in the past of Nehru, Nasser and Tito to revive it.

The image of Serbia in India is still a problem, as most remember the war and war crimes, mass graves in the former Yugoslavia. How would you recast this image for Indians so as to encourage investment and tourism?

First of all, Serbia has abolished visa requirements for Indians, unilaterally (along with visas for China, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia and other countries we have historical ties with). Serbia is a welcoming country, politically stable and we don't have any conflict any more. India-Serbia trade is very low at about \$160 million and we must find ways to increase this. Serbia is a bridge between the east and the west, is on the road to joining the European Union and we already have free trade agreements with many European countries. Goods manufactured in Serbia can be sent without customs duties to many countries and so we encourage Indian companies to take advantage of this.