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EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM BEIJING

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“ALL MY VENTURES ARE MAKE IN INDIA INITIATIVES”

Dr Rajendra Pratap Singh, is an eminent businessman, diehard patriot and philanthropist. His vision, dynamism and astute leadership have helped him erect Yogayatan Group, a multi-crore business empire that has carved a significant niche in the Indian corporate world. He is also an avid reader with an impressive personal library, shares his views through writings and interviews with leading national and international publications and had a deep interest in social issues. Here, he charts out his meteoric rise from a chawl-dweller to a captain of the industry.

Q The Yogayatan Group, under your leadership and guidance, has grown rapidly in the last 17 years into an illustrious conglomerate and leading business house of India with multifarious businesses, viz - Exports, Ports, Petroleum, Power, Construction, Infrastructure, to name a few. What inspired you to set out on this entrepreneurial journey?

My entrepreneurial journey started almost two decades ago. Although I am an Ayurvedic Doctor by education, I realized to fulfil my grandiose dreams I needed to move. Hence, I ventured into setting up diverse businesses. I started as a civil contractor, a real estate developer, a software exporter, and eventually got into setting up Yogayatan Port and Smart Cities, my most ambitious projects. My father was in the army and none of my ancestors have done any business. I have not studied any business management but it has helped me find my own ideas and chart my own path.

Q One of the most important and iconic projects of your Group is the Yogayatan Port at Mankhurd. It is one of the few ports to get ISO certified (ISO 9001:2008) in the region. What are some of its outstanding features and facilities that make it one of India's prominent private port and logistics operators?

The Yogayatan Port is revolutionary and a pioneer of sorts. It is the first private port of Mumbai Metropolitan Region. The other two, namely Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) and Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) are government owned. It is strategically located in the middle of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane cities with state-of-art infrastructure. It will be the fastest clearing port in the country. Nobody will be able to clear cargo faster than us. By using modern technology, systems and tagging, I will be able to clear every single container that arrives on port in less than four hours as compared to few days to few months in some cases; taken by other ports. It will be one of the greenest ports in the subcontinent. I am planning to run this port purely on green energy by using solar power and windmills. This will be the first of its kind in the world. The first phase of the port was operational in record 120 days. So in every respect, the Yogayatan Port has been breaking records and it is going to be extremely futuristic and cutting edge when fully complete.

Q How is the port going to support development and progress in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region?

The Yogayatan Port has been built to serve some crucial tasks. First, to decongest Mumbai. Currently, there are thousands of trucks that enter the city bearing bulk goods like coal and cement. The port will significantly clear the roads of trucks and heavy vehicles. It will create more free flowing traffic. There will be less pollution, less wastage of fuel. Secondly, it will generate large volume of jobs. It will decongest JNPT and MbPT from handling small and medium size cargo. It will garner crores of rupees in revenue to the government. The Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, while laying the foundation stone of the Port in December 2015, said in his speech that the Yogayatan Port will play an important role in reducing some of the congestion of major ports especially in handling bulk cargo for materials such as Coal. Our port is expected to handle 5 million metric tonne coal per year. Without his support it wouldn't have been possible.

Q The port has been envisaged over 7 phases. What will be its other attributes and advantages?

In Phase 2, we will be developing a passenger terminal to serve the needs of the commuters of Mumbai suburbs and Navi Mumbai. This will cut down travel time considerably from suburbs to South Mumbai. We are an island city and we should exploit our waterways. Phase 3 will set up Container Terminal to handle about 30000 units per annum. This terminal will be the most advanced and comprehensive container terminal in India. Phase 4 will be developing LNG terminal to receive LNG and reloading the same after regasification. Phase 5 will be a water sports & a yacht club. Phase 6 will be a ship building and ship repair yard and the last will be a thermal power plant. Now you don't need to go to Singapore and pay Keppel Shipyard a few million dollars for their services. Our port can provide a full-range of facilities at half the cost. It will generate jobs for our people. It will confer money to our country. My port is a complete 'Make in India' initiative, the dream of our Prime Minister, Shri. Narendra Modi.

Q The Yogayatan Jankalyan Trust, or the CSR division of your business, is spearheading many charitable works. Could you shed light on some of your philanthropic efforts?

SPECIAL FEATURE ON YOGAYATAN PORT

We sponsor the education of more than 4000 students from slums every year. We give them books and other educational facilities. This year we have given top end laptops to meritorious students. We have even sent some students abroad for further studies. We are going to adopt villages and construct their houses. So we are expanding our activities. I am working on Smart Cities in the same way. I think Smart City is not something where Wi-Fi is free. A Smart City should have good infrastructure, roads and public conveniences. I am doing the biggest slum project in the country with Shapoorji Pallonji. It is a multi-crore project located at Cuffe Parade and spread over 30 acres of land. I documented details of 7000 slums and its residents in 10 days, for which it usually takes 5 years. We offered our software to SRA also. I bring a system to overcome these hurdles.

Q Dr. Singh, you have been on the advisory board of many prestigious organizations of Government of India ranging from textiles, automobiles to heavy industry. What, according to you, is required for better governance and higher growth in the country?

I think the biggest problem is in understanding bureaucracy, judiciary, NGOs and the ministry. If we can get them to work concertedly and not at cross-purpose, I think we can become better than any other country in the world. It just needs political will.

Q You were recently appointed to the esteemed Board of Trustees of Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust. Being one of the few business persons on the Board, what counsel could be extended to promote and upgrade the administrative and financial concerns of Shirdi Temple, one of the most religious and sought after destinations of India.

The Shirdi Board has been constituted after 8 years. The Trust is bigger than most companies. They are going to spend Rs 3000 crores next year for their centenary cele-

brations. When I attended their meeting for the first time, we took 29 decisions on day one and decided to digitize and streamline the entire darshan process to do away with long endless queues. We made the hospital functional and got doctors appointed. An artificial pond that is expected to cater to one-fourth of entire water requirement of the temple was inaugurated by the new board. We are also taking ISO certification for the temple to standardize everything there including their bhajans, aartis and prasads which mutate every day.

Q To what do you most attribute your success? What would say are the five key elements for starting and running a successful business?

My father was an army officer. And after he quit for our education he became a security officer in a mill. And all my life I have stayed in a chawl of 100 square feet for 20 years till I started earning. I think burning passion, honesty, hard work, and divine intervention.

Q What has been your greatest challenge as an entrepreneur?

To look after my health which I habitually ignore. On a more serious note, I don't think I can recall any serious business challenges or road blocks. By the grace of God it has been a smooth run.

Q But have you ever experienced failure?

I don't take failure as failure. I think it is delay. It is not defeat. It doesn't bother me.

Q What three pieces of advice would you give to college students who want to become entrepreneurs like you?

- Love your country.
- Be honest, it pays.
- There is no substitute to hard work. You can defeat others only by working hard.

Interviewed By Shivani Maheshwari

