

Germany sees India as bridge to South

by Mary Burdman

German President Richard von Weizsäcker's emphasis on the importance of German-Indian cooperation for all North-South relations, during his state visit to India Feb. 28-March 6, was greeted with equal warmth by India. The President's visit was a "very appropriate and symbolic event," India's ambassador to Bonn, A. Madhavan, who accompanied him in India, told *EIR* April 18. "We have a very good feeling for Germany in India," the ambassador said.

Germany is India's fourth-largest trading partner, while the European Community altogether buys 25% of Indian exports, the U.S. accounts for 16%, and Japan 10%. India is the single largest receiver of German development aid, because of the two nations' historic relations, and India's size, population, and great need, a spokesman of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation said April 17. Germany has found "very good performance" on all but a few of its projects in India, he added.

India strongly supports good Indian-European relations, to which the von Weizsäcker visit made a big contribution, Ambassador Madhavan said. India's interest is in all Central Europe, the ambassador stated, but of course united Germany has a very strong and positive role in Europe, and India is hopeful of German help to enter the new Europe. India was, he pointed out, an unqualified supporter of German reunification.

On the economic side, India and Germany signed agreements worth 5 billion rupees, including 2 billion for importing fertilizer and capital goods from Germany. A technical cooperation agreement, to which Germany will contribute 100 million rupees, extends the Indo-German export promotion project for three years, to further increase Indian exports to Germany.

Germany's 'interlocutor'

The purpose of von Weizsäcker's visit went far beyond German-Indian investment. As commentator S. Nihal Singh wrote in the *Hindustan Times* March 11, the visit "was nothing short of an offer to make India Germany's principal interlocutor in the Third World." The seriousness of the offer was demonstrated by the creation of two consultative groups to "go into the whole gamut of the Indo-German relationship, from the specialist and technical groups formed and the kind of collaboration projects discussed," Singh wrote, noting that among von Weizsäcker's delegation were a professor of solid physics, an engineering expert, and an Indologist.

India now must take up the challenge, Singh wrote, with the immediate task of ensuring that the members of the consultative groups are not worn-out "notables." India should take up the German idea that "the two groups should have persons who could devote part of their lives to the cause of a new Indo-German relationship," Singh wrote.

The proposals discussed in India included one to have 100,000 Indian engineers and scientists work on collaborative projects in India and then be sent to Germany to upgrade their skills, to benefit both nations. Ambassador Madhavan said he would want to see such projects extended to industrial and shop workers. This is now difficult, he said, because it is difficult to get India recognized as an industrial nation. He expressed his admiration for German programs in which factories give workers practical training and institutes provide theoretical training.

That von Weizsäcker chose to come at all, "given the fragility of the Chandra Shekar government and the Gulf war, was his vote of confidence in the resilience of Indian democratic institutions," Singh wrote. Indeed, the opposition of many of the nations of the South to the Gulf war was likely a reason for the trip. In New Delhi, von Weizsäcker stated, "In the concert of nations involved, we Germans have shown a little more restraint than France or England, for instance, and I feel for good reason."

Von Weizsäcker also called on India to develop its "traditionally good relations with the Soviet Union," in order to strengthen the international role of the Soviets in respect to "the future shaping of the relations between North and South." Potential German-Indian-Soviet collaboration was proposed in a concrete form by Indian Foreign Secretary Munchkund Dubey, who said March 4 that a group was being set up to explore possible joint Indo-German projects in third countries. One promising area, he indicated, was the DM 8 billion project for building over 60,000 houses in the U.S.S.R. for Soviet soldiers returning from eastern Europe.

The role of culture

In his speech to President Venkataraman at a state dinner on March 1, von Weizsäcker raised a fundamental issue. "India and Germany are bound together by a long tradition of respectful spiritual interchange," he said. "The best of our poets, philosophers, and philologists have, over two centuries, made studies that have endeared the Indian people, their languages, their thinking, and their artistic creation to us. This has left a deep impression on us Germans, for which we are thankful to you. Between us there is an intimacy of opposites and a spiritual affinity from which we have both gained."

Germany is, Ambassador Madhavan pointed out, absolutely unique in the number of its scholars who study India, especially her great classic language Sanskrit. One of his goals, he said, is to encourage Germany to expand and modernize this work.