

From New Delhi by Susan B. Maitra

A fillip for Indo-U.S. ties

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Washington was brief, but potentially a great deal was accomplished.

Rajiv Gandhi's one-day official visit to Washington on Oct. 20 has given a dramatic thrust to relations between the two democracies that have seen qualitative, if halting, improvement since the 1982 initiatives of President Reagan and the late Indira Gandhi and the 1985 American tour of Rajiv Gandhi.

In two working sessions and a luncheon, President Reagan and Prime Minister Gandhi decided to renew the Ronald Reagan-Indira Gandhi Science and Technology Initiative for an additional three years beyond 1988, expand defense cooperation in technology and other military areas, step up joint work against drug trafficking and abuse, expand two-way trade and technology transfer, expand education, research and other exchange programs, and, finally, to undertake joint research in agriculture, water management, and evolution of ground-water resources.

The atmospherics surrounding the visit pointed to new gains. White House support for the Gandhi-Jayewardene initiative to resolve the crisis in Sri Lanka was complemented by a subdued Indian approach on U.S. policy in the Gulf and Afghanistan. The Pakistan bomb and related Non-Proliferation Treaty issue was handled in a low-key manner, to the discomfort of some on each side. Though India made its concerns clear, this did not appear to have included a challenge to Washington's view of Pakistan's strategic importance.

In formal remarks following the meetings, Gandhi went out of his way to endorse Reagan's commitment to elimination of nuclear weapons as a

commitment well known, despite the adoption of the Strategic Defense Initiative, otherwise the butt of demagogic attacks from Indian officials.

Even more interesting, in a press conference Oct. 21 in New York, Prime Minister Gandhi reported that he accepted Vice President Bush's assurances that the CIA was not engaged in destabilizing India—thus ripping a big hole in Moscow's attempts to stoke anti-American sentiment here.

Besides sessions with Reagan and Bush, Gandhi met separately with National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, and a group of congressmen. In Boston, Gandhi addressed a Harvard forum, and in New York he spoke at the U.N. and a joint meeting of the Asia Society, Indian Chamber of Commerce of America, and Foreign Policy Association.

One measure of the impact of these events can be taken in the dust kicked up back home. Gandhi's assertion that the talks were a success raised the hackles of some members of the parliamentary consultative committee attached to the External Affairs Ministry, whose portfolio the prime minister presently holds. Former Foreign Minister B.R. Bhagat, a pro-Moscow Congress socialist, reportedly led the pack, recording "reservations" about the U.S. attitude toward India where Pakistan is concerned.

The Pakistan bogey was seized on by the opposition Janata Party gaggle, too. News that the United States would comply with a previous agreement to supply certain military hardware to Pakistan, even while the new aid package was stalled in the U.S. Con-

gress, was cited to prove Gandhi's Washington visit "a singular flop."

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) targeted the defense cooperation agreement, demanding it be scrapped by Parliament. In an editorial, the party organ described the agreement as "anti-national." Negotiations on defense equipment, defense projects, and research would help the United States penetrate the country's vital defense capability, the CPM shrieked.

Indeed, expanded defense cooperation, particularly in light of deepening high-tech and scientific R&D ties, is one of the most significant results of the visit. This underscores the breakthrough made with Secretary Weinberger's visit to India last October, and the decision to collaborate on India's Light Combat Aircraft project. Indian requests for additional sophisticated defense equipment are already under discussion at the Pentagon.

Gandhi, in his White House remarks, identified "collaboration at the frontiers of technology" and "the tradition of scientific interaction" as the hallmark of the Indo-U.S. relationship. Significantly, export of the Cray XMP-14 supercomputer to India was cleared days before Gandhi's arrival, after protracted negotiations. According to U.S. officials, there has been a fivefold increase in export licenses issued for transfer of such high-technology items since the two countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding on High-Technology Transfer in 1985.

Ronald Reagan-Rajiv Gandhi Development Fellowships to promote exchanges in specialized areas of science and technology of mutual interest and regular consultations to keep supercomputer exports up to date and secure were also established. President Reagan's science adviser is scheduled to visit India in early 1988.