
India Gives German Industry Options

The Indian government invites German engineers to engage in infrastructural development of India.

Indian-German relations received a big push with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's state visit to Germany, May 28-29. He was the first Indian leader in 10 years to come to Germany. Vajpayee met Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, President Johannes Rau, cabinet ministers of economics and foreign relations, and—in what deserves special attention—also the minister of defense. The talks in Berlin on May 28, were crowned by the signing of an agreement to hold German-Indian cabinet-level consultations at least once a year, from now on. The German Chancellor will visit India next year, for the first such consultative summit meeting.

Vajpayee and his German hosts in Berlin agreed on a number of important international and strategic issues: 1) Both sides object to sending troops to any post-war mission in Iraq, unless the Iraqi situation has been thoroughly reviewed by the United Nations; 2) both insist on the UN's central role; 3) both will, for the time being, only take part in reconstruction projects in Iraq; 4) both sides insist that whatever problems may be posed by Iran's current nuclear technology program, be solved by strictly peaceful means; and 5) they agree that a stabilization of Afghanistan can only be achieved through combined security-economic cooperation between the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), the central Afghan government, and the neighboring countries. The emphasis they, they agree, should be on civilian reconstruction and development projects,

which shall be protected by the ISAF until the central Afghan government can do the job.

As far as the economic-technological side of Indian-German relations is concerned, Vajpayee's speech at a May 29, Munich German-Indian economic conference laid out the potential of vastly expanded cooperation: The Indian Prime Minister called on German industrial firms to utilize their genuine engineering capabilities to help India build roads, railways, sea ports, power plants. In particular, he proposed a German role in India's grand national water development plan, which is to connect 37 big rivers with canals, turning them into a huge waterway grid from the South to the North of the Subcontinent. One by-product will be measures to improve irrigation capacities in traditionally drought-plagued regions of India, and to improve the supply of fresh water for household consumption as well.

Vajpayee said that plans for Indian highway development alone envisaged construction of 13,000 kilometers—approximately the equivalent of building two huge highways in Europe, from Gibraltar to Moscow, and another one from Helsinki to Istanbul.

The Indian Prime Minister also offered Germany assistance in areas where India has an edge—for example, in nuclear technology, on which, unlike Germany, India has kept developing over the past 40 years.

Agreements for expanded cooperation in the space satellite sector are in preparation, and Germany is establish-

ing a center of engineering in India, which will soon begin work. And India's national space agency, which has worked with Germany in some select projects already, is offering to become a partner for Europe in a much broader cooperation in space exploration and development of orbital technologies. Also there, India does have a technological edge that is attractive for the Germans: On May 8, India successfully launched a geo-synchronous satellite into space, thereby becoming one of six countries that have that capacity.

To the Indian-German parliamentary friendship group, in Berlin on May 28, Vajpayee said: "Germany is India's fourth-largest trading partner and six-largest investor. In a reversal of historical trends, Indian companies are now looking at Germany for investment. But we cannot say that our bilateral trade of \$5 billion is anywhere near its true potential. . . . India has recently launched two German satellites. . . . But our joint use of space technologies for communications and developmental applications can go much further."

An "Indo-German institute of advanced technology will shortly be established in Vishakapatnam to strengthen dissemination of advanced technologies in areas ranging from precision manufacturing and infrastructure to environmental engineering," the Indian leader announced. In his Munich speech, he said, "India is engaged in the challenging and exciting task of steering a billion-strong population towards greater prosperity. Our experience has shown that technology can accelerate this process. We have travelled far in recent decades and are now concentrating on chosen areas of high technology for human development. In this effort, we value the cooperation of partners like Germany."