



HINDI IS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND PRIMARY TONGUE OF 30% of the people; there are 14 other official languages. English is also an official language for business and education.



INDIA'S DIVERSE ECONOMY ENCOMPASSES TRADITIONAL village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of services.



THE SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRY HAS A COASTLINE SPANNING 7,000 KM and the estimated population is at 1,095,351,995 inhabitants. The capital is New Delhi, there are 28 states and 7 union communities.

INDIA. The Daily Journal interviewed Deepak Bhojwani, the Indian ambassador to Venezuela, to discuss the Mercosur, bilateral energy agreements and tourism between the two emerging economies

Venezuela's emerging partner

Ambassador Deepak Bhojwani expressed his optimism in regional trade blocs worldwide, including one recently signed in South Asia, and believes that the Mercosur will eventually thrive. The exportation of crude to India has reactivated in the past year, and the trade potential is enormous. Indian culture is slowly being introduced into the Venezuelan conscience through food, dance and film initiatives, while tourism is being promoted, but has not begun to reach its potential.

Daniel Cancel
TDJ Caracas

After working as the Consul General in Sao Paulo, Brazil, you must have become familiar with the Mercosur, can you elaborate on the current state of the organization?

Mercosur has had its problems of integration, as you know, the main problems being between Brazil and Argentina, for various reasons there are exceptions to the TEC (Common External Tariffs)...but it's working well, and in my opinion we have, all countries in the world have an interest in lowering barriers to trade and economic interactions. We're doing that in our region in South Asia, we have the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, it's been around for almost 15 years, it's gotten off to a very slow start, partly because of political problems. But we have finalized the South Asia Free Trade Association Agreement SAFTA, so at least it's a step forward. So countries have realized the inevitability if not the necessity of integration. And I suspect, I think that's what's happening in Latin America, too. Mercosur was a very big step forward in the 1980's, I think the leaders of Brazil and Argentina realized that it doesn't make any sense to have political differences.

And even if there are political differences, it doesn't make any sense not to integrate economically. So with these two giants coming together and lowering barriers, of course the glaring differences that show up are, differences over the imports of refrigerators, or cars or whatever, in these areas we know there are sensitivities.

But look at what's going on, there's a lot that goes on, the movement between Argentina and Brazil is phenomenal, as it is between these two countries and Paraguay and Uruguay. So Mercosur has been an extremely happy experience in my opinion, apart from the fact, the seldom focused on fact that there is a lot of integration taking place among peoples, among the economies in general, businesses are willing to establish in one country or another, because what you do have is an open common market, so it makes a



Experienced diplomacy. Ambassador Deepak Bhojwani received The Daily Journal in his office. Here he is shown during the encounter April 20.

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lot of sense. You know a Brazilian businessman may want to invest in, say Paraguay or Argentina, and might have earlier wondered if it's a good idea, but now there seems to be no problem.

And similarly with the associate countries like Chile, Bolivia and Venezuela which is now going to integrate even further into Mercosur. So in my opinion it's not just advisable but inevitable, this integration and we do it all over, regional integration is taking place, global integration is taking place with the World Trade Organization, we're all a part of it, but there are bigger issues there, so let's start from home.

Are your trade agreements with the Mercosur mostly energy related?

No, it's a preferential trade agreement for products, commodities mainly, in certain commodities, I don't have the list on me, but there are lots of com-

modities in which we have complementarities, between Venezuela and India, Brazil and India, Argentina and India, we buy a tremendous amount, for example from Brazil, and Argentina of elementary products, you know, Soya oil, chicken, all sorts of things which we need in India.

Even energy related products for instance. There's a huge amount of trade between Brazil and India in the petrochemical and the petroleum front, we import crude oil from Brazil and we export diesel. And so on and so forth, so there's an incredible amount of complementarities and the same will exist with Venezuela.

When did crude begin to be exported to India?

We had crude being exported to India at the beginning of the century, I think in 1999, then as a result of the paro (national strike) in December 2002, the last shipment was stopped, it

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couldn't be shipped out. As a result the company couldn't come back. They came back last year, they've talked to PDVSA, they've done a spot transaction, they've bought on spot, they bought some crude this year, we hope it will continue, because there is a compatibility, there is a possibility of some refineries to refine Venezuelan crude, and as you know India needs energy security which is a very fundamental need of ours. And we look to Venezuela as a reliable supplier and a reliable partner.

Can you draw any conclusions between the process taking place in Venezuela at the moment with the current state of India?

Well they are both countries of the so-called South, which means developing countries, we have very dynamic economies right now, as you've seen, last year Venezuela grew faster than India. Everybody focuses on the Indian

growth of 8 percent, Venezuela grew at 9.3 percent, but that of course was due understandably to a fall in 2003, but nevertheless it does signify that there's a tremendous amount of growth and we've seen, not just because of the price of oil, there's been a considerable amount of economic activity taking place in investments, infrastructure, and so on and so forth. And what we find is that, Venezuela has a considerable amount of potential and it's implementing a lot of policies. *Sembra de Petroleo* for example, is a policy which orients its wealth to a large section of people who may have been excluded.

And I've been to the barrios and to the experiments that are taking place, in the Nucleo Fabricio Ojeda for instance, we went two weeks ago and we found that there is a tremendous foundation of health care activity, education activity and so on, now of course these are structures that the government puts in place and the people have to make them work, the Mercal functions well and so on. Now similarly in India, after our independence in 1947, we started a program of a planned economy, we found that we had to fine-tune the so-called planning, we still have a planned economy, we make five-year plans, but our reform process has ensured that this planning process does not hold down the dynamics and the energies of a young economy, and it's a young economy.

So we find that both ways the priorities are the same, which is to increase the welfare and to provide mobility for the large number of people who do not have what the few have access to, which is employment, possibility of wealth generation, and the access to basic needs, you know in a country like India with a population that is colossal, you have basic needs like water, electricity, housing, etc. which we need to improve. We've done a tremendous amount on self-sufficiency in say, food grains and so on, we've done a tremendous amount on education, we've done a lot on health care and so on and so forth. We've eradicated some major diseases, small pox, measles, polio and so on from India.

But we have a long way to go before we can say that we've achieved a level of development which is satisfactory, and the same thing for Venezuela. ■

Is there much tourism exchange between the two countries?

It has grown, as usual there are three fundamental problems. One is the so-called distance, which I don't consider a problem, but it's a mental problem; people think India is so far. Actually the fact is if you go via Europe, it's 7 or 8 hours to Paris, Frankfurt, Milan or Madrid, and another 8 hours from there to Delhi or Bombay, so it's not a big deal. The second thing is that we don't have air connections which are direct. It's not easy, I admit, you would have to have an *escala* (connection) somewhere, so that again is not really a problem; if you see it in real terms, you've got 5 or 6 connections through Europe with a transit halt of two or three hours at most so you can go via any European capital and reach India easily, and very economically I dare say.

The third problem of course is the one of awareness, that people don't know about India, they're a little concerned about what they'll find there and so on, and that's part of our job, that's what we do everyday. We have a website, it's www.embindia.org, which you are welcome to access, we update it as often as we can, there's a lot of background information, tourist information, we have a library downstairs, we publish a lot of material in Spanish for our Venezuelan friends, and visas are given almost invariably within 24, maximum 48 hours and so on. We're doing our best and I must say there's been a tremendous response. We've had a lot of cultural festivities, events over the past two years that I've been here, we've had food festivals, music and dance festivals, seminars, film festivals, we're hoping to bring Indian films over here, sub-titled or dubbed, the Bollywood films.

So we're trying to introduce India to people, trying to demystify it and to sell it as an attractive destination which it definitely is. Here we also do our best to inculcate a culture of Venezuela in India. I mean short of selling *arepas* in Delhi or Bombay restaurants, which would gain momentum I'm sure, there's a lot of interest in *salsa*. I personally have friends who are very fascinated by *salsa*, and geography is pretty well-known, and it's getting better known, Canelma, the Angel Falls, the beaches, Los Roques, and so on. Language is an issue, we're trying to address that, what we've asked Universities to do through *convenios* and agreements is to have more language training in India of guides and people who speak Spanish, even shop assistants and restaurants, and over here there is an attempt to learn more English to make it more tourist friendly.



Photo Raul Corredor

Bhojwani has a long diplomatic record both inside and outside of India. With both Business and International Law degrees, he has served in Spain, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Czech Republic, Brazil and Venezuela.



WHAT IS THE EMBASSY DISCUSSING WITH THE GOV'T?

We've been talking to the government, politically of course, the relations are excellent, we've had the visit of President Chávez last March 2005, and it was a very successful visit, we are common members in several international forums, apart from the United Nations, we are members of the NAM, the G-15, the G-20, and the WTO and so on and so forth. So we have a lot in common politically and economically and this we are seeking to exploit, we are seeking to have a better energy agreement with Venezuela, we have been buying crude oil from them, despite the distance we find that it still works economically and we are eager to enter into the exploration of oil and gas over here, we are talking to the government about that. We are talking about helping out in the sector of health, for instance, we have a tremendous health program in India, we have a lot of science and technology, pharmaceuticals, and we have information technology as you are aware, so in all areas across the board we are seeking agreements at government level first, and these can eventually incorporate into local institutions, local governments, even enterprises so that we can create a sort of channel for this complementarity to be given flesh and blood. Which means what we do is like in India if we've developed a certain variety of medicinal plant, we have possibilities of exchanging that technology with Venezuela, because it has the technology to exploit heavy crude, we have some heavy crude which we've discovered in West India. This is the basic thing, complementarities and friendly collaboration.