



Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg

Erster Bürgermeister

Senate reception for the opening of “India Week”

9 September 2013, Great Banquet Hall (Festsaal), Town Hall

Mr. Chadha,
Consul General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the ties between India and Hamburg are very special and go back a very long way. For more than four hundred years ships have been carrying cargo from Indian ports to Hamburg - and vice versa. The common bonds between Hamburg and the vast sub-continent of India are shipping, business, science, partnerships, friendships ... and, quite simply, the interest we take in each other.

This is a question I'd like to ask the citizens of Hamburg - what are your connections with India? And the question for our Indian guests is - what draws you to Hamburg? More than three thousand people from your fascinating country live in our city, and last year over seven thousand tourists from India visited Hamburg.

Probably everyone will have a different answer to my question. But we do all benefit from these encounters, from what is unique and special about other people, what we have in common and the different ways we set about doing things.

My visit to India last autumn made a deep impression on me. There is probably no other country with so many different peoples, languages, cultures and religions. Few other countries offer such a rich history and heritage combined with such dynamism and openness to what is new.

The Republic of India is one of the world's ten biggest national economies; some sectors of its industry are among the world's very best. India is part of the globalized economy, with all the challenges and benefits that this entails.

India is a country of contrasts. Its IT industry is a world leader, exporting specialists to other countries. At the same time, a third of the population lives on or below the poverty line. Oxen pull ploughs in the shadow of nuclear power stations. Many of the reflections in glass façades are of very simply dressed passers-by.

With 1.2 billion inhabitants, India is the second-largest country on earth, and its biggest democracy. That is good. Even though we know that there are also a fair number of problems.

In recent years India's growth rates have been eight per cent or higher. This has spurred business relations with our city. The port, above all, plays an important role here. Ships arrive in Hamburg from India carrying textiles, spices, chemical products and mineral oil products. Between 2005 and 2012 the volume of trade between India and Hamburg grew by 90 per cent. Instead of handling 76,000 standard containers, as it did in 2003, the port now tranships 276,000 containers, including the shipments via Sri Lanka.

More than 450 Hamburg-based companies have business relations with India. About a hundred of these firms, which are active in foreign trade, logistics or the medical engineering industry, have their own representatives, branch offices or production facilities in India. For them, the sub-continent holds enormous reserves of growth potential.

The City of Hamburg offers various forms of advice and assistance. Since 2011 the Hamburg representative office in Mumbai has provided investors from Hamburg with information about business opportunities in India. North German consultancy is also available in New Delhi.

Moving in the other direction, increasing numbers of Indian companies are investing in Hamburg. Tata Consultancy Services is one example. Another is Suzlon Energy Ltd., India's biggest manufacturer of wind turbines, which operates a research facility at REpower Systems, its Hamburg-based company. Several importers of apparel and spices can be added to the list. A total of forty Indian companies have established offices in the metropolitan region.

During my visit in October, I could see for myself what our partner country India offers in terms of prospects and business potential. Hamburg is already working closely with Indian partners on matters relating to the port industry, health and renewable energies. We hope to expand these collaborations further.

During the trip, the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce and the Confederation of Indian Industry signed a Memorandum of Understanding to develop job profiles and vocational training schedules that are appropriate for workers in the Indian transport and logistics industries. For this sector alone, it is estimated that India needs more than 17 million skilled workers.

Not only is India's economy booming, the country also has a place among the world's best when it comes to modern technology and natural sciences. Many thousands of Indian scientists have studied at German universities and institutes of higher education.

For many years Hamburg universities have been cooperating with India's elite universities and research institutions. Our universities counted 182 Indian students matriculated for the winter semester of 2011/2012. Most of them are studying engineering courses at the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg - and their grades are above average.

For the past eight years Hamburg University's Asia-Africa Institute has organized an annual South Asia Day to discuss economic, political and cultural issues in the region. The German Institute of Global and Area Studies, also based in Hamburg, is likewise committed to the study of political, economic and social developments in India.

India is fascinating. Splendid cultural assets and fascinating landscapes attract countless tourists. The national film industry is the largest in the world. Indian authors, including some Nobel prize laureats, have produced major works of literature. Cultural facilities in Hamburg, such as "Kampnagel" or the "FRISE" house of artists, and federations like the German-Indian Society maintain a lively exchange with creative individuals and cultural institutions in major Indian cities such as Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad. They organize festivals with Indian and German artists, choreographers and musicians in Hamburg and India.

The "Metropolis" municipal cinema regularly holds film weeks to show new films from India as well as retrospectives. A delegation from Hamburg's Ministry of Culture travelled to New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Calcutta at the end of 2009, and this first trip initiated many contacts that have evolved into strong cooperation projects over the years. This proved very beneficial for the culture programme during India Week in 2011.

The “Yamuna-Elbe, Public Art Outreach” art project, for example, attracted considerable attention; it brought together artists, scientists, environmental campaigners and philosophers in a study of the environmental, economic and spiritual roles played by our rivers.

This year, Ms Ines Lechtleitner will present the sequel to this project by searching for the “Yamuna-Elbe perfume”.

Over the past two years jazz bands from Hamburg have toured cities in India and collaborated with Indian musicians. This was backed by our Kulturbehörde and the Unwind Center Chennai. The “Cross over Cultures” concert on 12 September at Altona’s “Fabrik” features these jazz musicians from Hamburg and their guests from India. There will be a foretaste even tonight, I hope you’ll enjoy it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am looking forward to the next few days of this fantastic programme, which shows so many different aspects of a fascinating country. India Week 2013 spotlights business and cultural topics; by means of panel discussions, readings, concerts, dance and cinema performances it will illustrate some traditional and modern characteristics of Indian culture and society.

I cordially invite you to come and experience India in Hamburg from now until the 15th of September. I hope you meet inspiring people and I am sure that the long and very special connection between the city of Hamburg and India will become more intense during the days that lie ahead. Thank you very much.