

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

India looks East

Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Japan has put relations between the two Asian giants on a new plane.

A new phase of Indo-Japanese relations has started," declared Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the banquet in his honor hosted by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone on Nov. 28. The banquet followed several hours of private discussion between the two leaders.

By all accounts, this is an accurate characterization of the prime minister's four-day official visit. Mr. Gandhi was clear and unambiguous in communicating the importance India attaches to its friendship with Japan, for bilateral cooperation as well as collaboration in the international arena, a view reciprocated by Mr. Nakasone.

The mutual commitment to an expanded relationship is grounded in a new comprehensive bilateral agreement on science and technology, signed by Foreign Ministers B.R. Bhagat and Shimparo Abe on Nov. 29. The agreement sets up a joint committee that will meet alternately in Delhi and Tokyo, beginning shortly, to oversee implementation of mutually agreed projects and proposals.

Besides Japan's pledge of an additional \$160 million credit to help India build a gas-turbine power generating station in Assam, two significant new decisions emerged from the talks. First is a Japanese commitment to technical and financial collaboration in modernizing India's steel industry and assistance to its textile and railway sectors. Second is the decision to explore joint industrial projects in third countries. Greatly expanded scientific exchanges are also envisioned.

A "Festival of India" in Japan and corollary "Japan Week" in India have been put on the agenda, along with a major seminar on Indo-Japanese relations in Delhi in the coming few months, to begin to respond to the need, articulated by Rajiv Gandhi, for a "much higher level" of exchanges between the two countries in all spheres.

In a busy schedule of meetings and forums with officials and legislators as well as businessmen, Gandhi explained India's long-term plans and present projects for boosting the economy into the 21st century. But he also sought to learn, as he put it, "about Japan and its gifted people who have carved out for themselves a special place in history."

Japan was the first Asian country to overcome poverty and enter the ranks of the developed nations, Gandhi pointed out in one of his addresses, and India and other nations of the continent were proud of this achievement. "Today, Japan sets the pace for the world in several areas of technology. Your production and management methods are studied with admiration and even awe. You have upset many old notions about man and machine, about individual attitudes and corporate performance," he said.

"We trust that Japan will play a positive role in creating an international climate which will help the weak countries to build their productive capacities."

Significantly, Japan's very first yen credit was extended to India.

"Japan and India must work to-

gether—the good of Asia and the good of humanity have cast this duty on us," Mr. Gandhi told the Japanese parliament, the Diet. He singled out the threat of nuclear war and the need to create a just and equitable international economic order as the two most urgent issues on the international agenda.

These same concerns and convictions were echoed by Prime Minister Nakasone, who repeatedly threw aside protocol to emphasize the significance he attaches to his relationship with the Indian prime minister. "I am convinced that enhancing the cooperative relations between these two leading Asian democracies is of immeasurable importance," he stated.

Mr. Nakasone spoke of Japan's sense of responsibility to use its economic power, technology, and experience to assist the developing nations in their nation-building and human resource-development efforts, and of India's own commitment and record in these areas. India and Japan must join hands to act together as a bridge between North and South, he said.

The Japanese press reflected the broader enthusiasm in Japan for the renewed relationship, and the high regard in which India is held. "In the aftermath of Japan's defeat in the Second World War, it was the prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, the 'Star of Asia,' who gave the war-weary Japanese people the encouragement and moral support they needed," the daily *Asahi Shimbun* editorialized. "Nehru was unmistakably a positive influence in speeding up Japan's post-war national reconstruction efforts."

Ties had ebbed between India and Japan during the 1960s and 1970s, but were revived again by Mrs. Indira Gandhi with Japan's growing economic involvement in India and the 1984 visit by Mr. Nakasone to Delhi.