

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

India's Ibero-American initiatives

In the last four years, Mrs. Gandhi pressed forward to establish important economic and technological ties with Ibero-America.

One of the most important projects of the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was her work to deepen ties with the nations of Ibero-America, with whom India shares many concerns of sovereign development and world affairs. There is every indication that Rajiv Gandhi will continue this work.

In a statement issued just days after he became Prime Minister in the wake of his mother's brutal murder, Rajiv Gandhi expressed concern on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement over escalating tensions in Central America. He reiterated India's conviction that the Contadora Group's efforts offered the only path to a solution.

On Jan. 15, Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín will be the chief guest at India's Republic Day ceremonies, a special honor. Alfonsín and Prime Minister Gandhi will sign cooperation agreements drafted in September by the first meeting of the newly established Indo-Argentine Joint Committee which may include expanded nuclear-energy cooperation.

India's interest in engaging the major Ibero-American nations in consultation and joint action with the Non-Aligned bloc on world economic and political problems was made clear in Indian President Zail Singh's four-day state visits to Argentina and Mexico in April of this year, the first by an Indian head of to Ibero-America. In Argentina, Zail Singh was honored by being invited to address a joint session of the national congress.

During Zail Singh's visit to Ar-

gentina, a shipping agreement was signed that will establish regular shipping service between the two countries and will also open up Brazil and other Ibero-American countries to Indian trade. Talks were also initiated to expand existing cooperation in science and technology.

With India, Argentina is one of the few developing nations that has developed nuclear power technology and has refused to bow to the dictates of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Also like India, Argentina has been a victim of British colonialism.

In Mexico, the Indian President met twice with Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, during which the need for a new international economic order, "more rational and in accordance with the needs of the developing nations," was agreed upon, according to an official Mexican government announcement. The progress of the Contadora initiative was also discussed, and the Mexican President, like his Argentine counterpart, was briefed on India's views on the major world issues. Both leaders vowed greater cooperation in international forums such as the United Nations.

Two pacts, in science and technology and in education and culture, were extended, and a joint commission was set up to oversee implementation of these and future agreements. Machine-tool technology, information science, water resource management, and medical and agricultural research are included in the agreements.

Cooperation with Mexico in the oil sector is a priority for India, and was a major topic at the follow-up Joint Commission meetings in Mexico City in September. India is interested in buying technology to manufacture offshore rigs.

The developments of last year were prepared in a series of initiatives undertaken by Mrs. Gandhi, beginning with her 1968 "voyage of discovery" to 10 Ibero-American nations. Though Mrs. Gandhi was convinced that India and the Ibero-American nations had much in common and that their friendship and cooperation would be of great benefit, the response from the Ibero-American side was, at best, slow and uneven.

As soon as Mrs. Gandhi returned to power in 1980, she renewed her efforts. The high interest rates and world economic crisis had reminded the Ibero-American nations sharply of their vulnerability as developing nations. That year, then Indian Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao organized a dialogue between Indian officials and the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America to discuss expanded ties.

In 1981, Mexican President López Portillo visited India as the honored guest at Republic Day, and before the year was out, Venezuelan President Herrera Campins had also paid a state visit to India. In 1981, India concluded trade agreements with Guatemala and Argentina. Then Commerce Minister Pranab Mokherjee visited Argentina and Brazil during July, and the Cancún Summit took Mrs. Gandhi herself to Mexico in October.

The López Portillo visit to India opened intensive discussions on economic cooperation, and by the end of 1982, a broad Bilateral Agreement on Economic Cooperation had been finalized.