

Economic Reforms Create A Win-Win Situation

## India emerges as the focus of Swiss foreign investment



India and Switzerland have enjoyed excellent economic relations for more than half a century since the start of early business collaborations between the two countries. The most striking feature of trade between India and Switzerland in recent years is that it grew by a remarkable 170 percent between 1991 and 2004, during which period India had carried out a far-reaching economic reforms programme. In addition to the rising merchandise trade, the bilateral trade in services -- tourism, IT and financial services -- too has been growing. In 2004, Indo-Swiss bilateral trade shot up by 37.4 percent to cross 1.5 billion Swiss francs. It has been a win-win situation for both countries. **Joseph Koch**, Director, Swiss Business Hub, and former President of the Trade Commissioners' Forum, has summed up the phenomenal growth aptly: "I see that Switzerland, from the point of view of foreign investment, has taken India into focus." In other words, Swiss companies have aggressively participated in the modernization process of the Indian industry through offers of technology and investment.

**As a member country of the Trade Commissioners Forum, which are the areas where you think India and Switzerland can collaborate?**

First of all I would like to say that Switzerland is one of the founding members of the TCF and we are a strong supporter of a forum like this because we believe in a common platform shared by our colleagues from other countries. And convinced that when we go somewhere or

when we have a presentation as a common group, we have a better access to good and solid information.

**When we talk about trade between Switzerland and India, we have potential sectors like watch, chocolate, tourism and many more. During your tenure at the Swiss Business Hub, which upcoming areas according to you have seen growth and what is the future of trade between both the countries?**

I have been here for almost four years now. And I see that Switzerland from the foreign investment point of view has taken India into focus. The Swiss companies are realizing that India is an excellent platform for doing business. That is the reason why we have a strong foreign investment in India. We have also seminars in Switzerland, which are more frequented than before because India has the potential. India has highly qualified people, excellent work force that makes my belief strong for India. If some of the minus points could be eliminated, India could be an ideal place to come.

### **What role plans do you have for the forum as a member of the TCF and the representative of your country?**

We have been planning activities for the forum quite regularly. We have just announced the list of various colleagues of the other countries. I was the President of the forum for two years and now I am the treasurer. I know that I can profit from every meeting and event. When we are together, we can exchange views among our colleagues, for example, just day before I had a serious problem, which

I could discuss during our forum meeting, and now I have got a solution to it.

### **Could you throw some light upon the history of relations between Switzerland and India?**

The ties between India and Switzerland are very strong. Switzerland was the first country to sign the Friendship Treaty with India in 1948. But even before that, Swiss companies and Switzerland had been doing business with India. Volkart Brothers, the cotton and commodity dealers had opened their office in Switzerland and in then Bombay on the same day in 1857. One of the first joint ventures between a foreign company and an Indian company was Laxmi Rieter that still exists in Coimbatore.

We are very strong in machinery and we have companies called Filler (milling machinery for rice mills, flour mills) and pops is a company producing packaging machinery in Pune. Both these companies are also producing here and exporting. So more or less we are also creating new job opportunities in India. I think this move is positive and a contribution to the Indian economy. ■

