

## The Dutch focus on India's agri-business



Hans Ramaker

# A Lot To Give & Take



The Dutch, adventurous and sea-loving, left tell-tale signs of their forays into trading in India along the country's east and west coast nearly five hundred years ago. While the early Dutch traders bought and sold rare and priceless things like pashmina shawls, their descendents established multinationals such as Unilever and Shell and spread them across the globe, including the East. **Hans Ramaker**, Consul General of the Netherlands, looks at several potential areas, including agricultural products processing and logistics in which his country is a leader, for joint ventures with Indian companies.

### Could you share your experience in India so far?

I came to India in September 2005. I have not seen much of India as yet. I happened to visit Cochin and Surat. Both places have remnants of Dutch trade and its touch and a proof of their existent in around 16th to 17th century. So the trade relation goes back to such a long period. The first products to be traded were Pashmina shawls and rich embroidered shawls used by the local governors in Indonesia (former Dutch India!)

You will find Dutch touch in Goa, Cochin everywhere along the Indian coast, from Chatrapur on the east coast to Gujarat on the west, and even in some parts of Mumbai. We have a number of Anglo-Dutch companies. Unilever is one example. In fact, if you go back to 100 years, there are MNCs in Holland which started operations with India: Philips, Shell and Unilever or as you call it Hindustan Lever. They brought the first wave of serious trade with India. In 70s and 80s there was the second wave of Dutch companies that came to India, IT companies, banks and financial services: ING Vysya, ABN Amro, Rabo Bank and

later on the third wave is now and consists of the middle size companies. They now explore opportunities with India. Some of them used to come here as buyers, for products and services that India can offer at a cheaper price. But I don't consider low labor cost as an advantage to come to India. We are interested in India much more because of its great potential of high skilled professionals and its scientific achievements.

The trade from Indian side is not yet very good but because of the geographical location of Netherlands we have a lot of opportunity. We have three major ports of Europe around us.

### What are your comments on the activities of the TCF?

I will not be able to comment much on the activities of the TCF as I have not yet participated in any of the AGMs and I just joined in July 2005 but I can say what my predecessor has said that it is a unique forum for the European trade commissioners in Mumbai and we respect that.

### What in your view are the potential areas where both the countries can collaborate?

We are now concentrating on the bio-medical and nano-technological Indian industries. Agri business is one more area where we are focusing on. Netherlands is, as you know, the third largest exporter of agriculture products in the world. For a country the size of Holland that is quite an achievement and only possible through the high import of technology. We think we can be of assistance to develop agriculture in India too. Processing and logistic is another important area where we are seriously thinking of getting into. ■