



Consulate General
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Mumbai

Address:
Hoechst House, 10th Floor
Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021

INTERNET: www.mumbai.diplo.de
TEL (+ 91-22) 2283 2422
FAX (+91-22) 2202 5493

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Speech by German Consul General Michael Siebert

on the occasion of the bestowment of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany
on Prasad Chandran

Dear Prasad Chandran,
dear Mrs. Chandran and family members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
friends,

I would like to cordially welcome you all to this special ceremony.

For the Head of a German Mission abroad, one of the most pleasant duties is to bestow the “Bundesverdienstkreuz”, the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. Today, I have the honor and great pleasure to bestow on you, Prasad Chandran, the Cross of the Order of Merit or “Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande”.

Dear Prasad Chandran, there is no free lunch ... – I cannot spare you at least some details of your distinguished career and your achievements, although, of course, you, and all of us, are very familiar with them. You have spent your student years in Bombay for a diploma in Chemistry and in Chandigarh for an MBA. You also followed additional management training at Wharton, as well as in the UK and Japan. Your connection to Germany started when you joined BASF, the company that has been at the center of your professional life. As CEO and Managing Director, you were at the helm of BASF India, with responsibility for the whole of South Asia, for almost 14 decisive years from 2000 till 2013. You are also on the board of several leading German and Indian corporations across various sectors, including Bosch and HDFC Standard Life Insurance, represented here by quite a few of our guests.

During your time as CEO of BASF India, its share price went up 560 %! I do not want to play with numbers, but BASF AG in Germany only went up 194 % in the same period. So, even if you take into account the devaluation of the Rupee against the Euro, there still is a Prasad Chandran factor! So, Prasad, you got your numbers right! But good numbers are far from being your only objective in life.

To me, with all the steeliness that is needed to run a multinational company, you were always as much a human being, or should I say, a humane being. A wonderful person and a great personality.

Let me address your work ethics: After handing over BASF to Raman Ramachandran in 2013, your primary focus has been on promoting good governance, nation building and the fight against corruption. You are the embodiment of a concerned, dedicated citizen. Your vision is a fully developed India in the foreseeable future. You know that this will need a lot more concerned and dedicated citizens than just yourself.

So, two years ago, you founded SEEGOS, a social enterprise working with a huge number of volunteers from the corporate sector, government organisations, educational institutions, social groups. Your anti-corruption project “A Million Minds” speaks for itself.

Let me now come to the main point tonight:

Why are we honouring you today with the Order of Merit? Not because of your work for BASF – you were decently paid for it, I hope. And not for your work as a dedicated Indian citizen – others, I am sure, will give you recognition for it. We are honouring you today for your outstanding contribution to Indo-German relations.

You have always been a friend of Germany, shown great interest in our country, in its economy, in its work ethics. You have been a very knowledgeable and keen advisor to me and my predecessors, as well as to German Ambassadors in India (by the way, I came back from Delhi last night and bring you the best wishes and congratulation from Ambassador Dr. Martin Ney), to the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce and many, many others on all topics Indian. You have explained Indian business and society to us, encouraged us, introduced us to the right people, and given us the best advice. How could German businesses operate in India without the support of people like you? India is an immensely complex country, and we need friends like you, to understand it and to work for our mutual interests and benefits.

Whenever there were high-level delegations from Germany, requests for briefings, or just the odd question about something not easily understandable for a newcomer to India, you were there, you are there.

Of course I have to mention your fantastic contributions to the Indo-German Training Center. Early on, you seem to have been impressed by the German model of dual education. Bernhard Steinrücke told me that you have always been among the most important collaborators for IGTC. Not only did you do your utmost to make it a center of excellence for German corporates.

Your special focus has always been on teaching the students business ethics. Thanks to your impulse, business ethics and corporate governance have been integrated into the IGTC curriculum since 2011. You sent all your top managers to the IGTC to teach there, so that, as Bernhard has confided to me, the running gag went: When the entire BASF board is at IGTC, who then runs BASF? Of course, you also employed almost all BASF interns from IGTC, and under much improved financial conditions, so that the company became, in addition to “The Chemical Company”, also “the most sought after company”.

In a way, your efforts were crowned in 2014 when one of your pupils, Sanjeev Gandhi, became the first Asian member of BASF’s Board of Executive Directors in Ludwigshafen.

One may say that you have been a trendsetter on compliance because you introduced special policies and mechanisms in BASF long before compliance rules became a general topic. And of course, when the topic became unavoidable for every German company, Jürgen Hambrecht, then CEO and now Director of the Supervisory Board of BASF, was very grateful to you for your stance and your work. As the representative of Germany here, I wish to say that my country is grateful to you for your trendsetting role in compliance matters because your shining example has much contributed to the positive image of German corporates in India.

Much beyond the IGTC, you have been closely associated with the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, having served on its Committee for more than 15 years now with immense dedication. You were Vice-President, then President in the years 2006 till 2008, much at the forefront when the Chamber celebrated its Golden Jubilee. And you are still on the Committee now that the Chamber turns 60. You have always been one of the most active members at IGCC, and without people like you, the Chamber would not be the biggest and most important German Chamber world-wide.

And, I think, one can add without lying: Without people like you, Germany would not have a presence of around 1,800 companies in India, Germany would not have surpassed Britain as a destination for students, and so on – all to the benefit of both our countries.

Dear Prasad Chandran, thank you for all that you did for Germany and Indo-German relations. Thank you for being such a good and reliable friend of Germany. My feeling after some years In India is: Each of us, of course, needs good friends everywhere. But in a country like India, with the very special role that reliable personal contacts do play here, it is all the more important.

Today, Germany is awarding you its Order of Merit in honor of your deepening the ties between our two countries and in particular Indo-German business relations. Let me congratulate you on this occasion and sincerely thank you for your work. I am sure you will continue to be closely associated with Germany and the German business community. I wish you all the very best and much success for all your activities.

Dear Prasad Chandran,
on behalf of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, I will now decorate you with the Cross of the Order of Merit.