

# GATES-WAY TO INDIA

The Microsoft chief mixed philanthropy and business with practised ease. His \$500 million commitment will generate both goodwill and market.

MUSTAFA QURAIISHI/THE INDIAN EXPRESS



\$100 million for AIDS control

AFP PHOTO



\$300 million for IT sector

AFP PHOTO



\$100 million for India unit

**FRIENDS ALL:** Gates with Kalam (top); and (from left) Sinha; Infosys chief N.R. Narayana Murthy; Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu

■ by Shefalee VASUDEV and Vivek LAW

**A**MONG THE MOST VALUABLE assets of Bill Gates, the world's richest man, is his serene smile. It helps the chairman of Microsoft in his transition from a hard-nosed businessman to a man who wants to save the world from diseases. On his third trip to India, where one minute he was

promising \$100 million (Rs 480 crore) to fight AIDS and the other committing \$400 million over three years to boost Microsoft's fortunes in India, the smile was always visible.

There's a reason for this complacency. Back in the US Gates may face anti-trust suits and even have the odd cream pie flung in his face by protestors, but in India he gets treated like a head of state. As Gates shuttled from

one city to another in his sleek silvery Bombardier Global Express 7748 jet, chief ministers and corporate honchos left no stone unturned to court his attention. And he theirs. For this four-day visit was not all about what Gates can give India, but also about what India can give Microsoft.

The visit began amidst controversy. Union Health Minister Shatrughan Sinha, a former film star, objected to a

recent US National Intelligence Council (NIC) report projecting HIV-positive cases in India at 25 million by 2010. Gates deftly relegated the issue to the back pages of newspapers by saying his foundation had nothing to do with the study. A visibly elated Sinha was made chairperson of the India AIDS Initiative. And the controversy ended, for now at least.

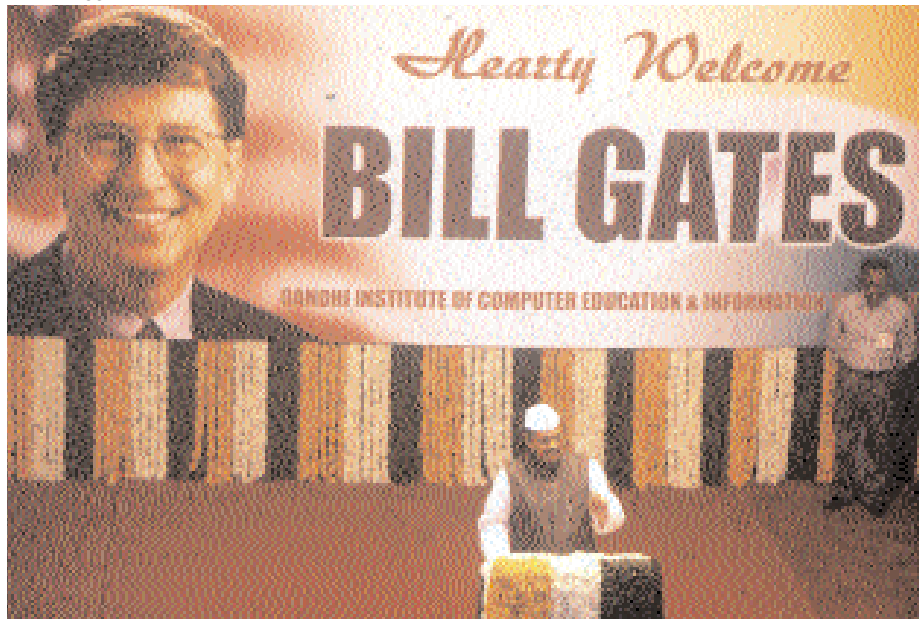
Gates then got down to nibbling his favourite—the good old samosa. And he did not mind the security blanket—he is quite used to it. In Delhi, he announced the AIDS grant would focus on two areas: the high-risk mobile population and for communication and advocacy. “We will ensure that our resources go to organisations with credible track records,” said Gates when asked by INDIA TODAY whether the foundation can sift genuine AIDS-campaigns from the murkier ones.

**B**UT questions remain. “It remains to be seen whether the \$100 million will go to the same high-profile NGOs or to newer ones as well,” says Dr Chinkholal Thangsing, director, Action India, a Delhi-based NGO. Quite in the same vein, Sandhya Bhalla, Programme Director at cii’s Indian Business Trust for HIV-AIDS, says, “Nobody doubts the managerial skills of the foundation, but we hope all stakeholders are involved in fund distribution.” There are also fears that the disbursement of funds will get entangled in red tape given the Government’s involvement in the project. But Joe Cerrell, public affairs director, Gates Foundation, is quick to the defence: “We have researched the Government’s strategy and have worked out how we can fill the gaps.” Also, Gates expects AIDS Initiative director Ashok Alexander to keep tabs.

Controversy apart, the welcome extended to Gates spoke volumes. From meeting the President and prime minister to talking to HIV-infected people, Gates looked every bit a man who knew what he wanted. When Gates walked down the Mughal Gardens with A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the tycoon in a dark suit and the rocket scientist in a light mood, they added a breath of mutual respect to the crisp November day. In contrast, the reception Sinha hosted for Gates that evening at a five-star hotel was lukewarm. Sinha, minus the AIDS red ribbon, was as bombastic as ever: “We admire you for your looks, but we admire you more for your deeds,” he told Gates, who just smiled.

Philanthropy over, Gates got down

FAWZAN HUSAIN



**HOW HE WOODED INDIA**

**PR: Walked the red carpet with the President, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and chief ministers with ease.**

AFP PHOTO/JOHN MACDOUGALL



**LINK UPS: Hobnobbed with top corporate honchos like Mukesh Ambani, praised software engineers and signed BPO deal with Wipro.**

AFP PHOTO



**LARGESE: Inks portal deal with Karnataka Chief Minister S.M. Krishna, \$20 million for Shiksha project.**

AFP PHOTO



**WINDOW TO GATES: Maharashtra Chief Minister V. Deshmukh does the honours**

to doing what he does best. Over the next three days in Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad he made it clear that he meant business. Microsoft’s proposed investments of \$400 million will eventually mean more business for Microsoft.

India is a market with huge potential and Microsoft can ill-afford to allow any other software, Linux for instance, to make inroads. Gates, therefore, is keen on tie-ups with state governments and Indian companies to ensure their projects use Microsoft software, and sell hundreds of thousands of “Tablet PCs” to Indians. Critics of Microsoft even posted cynical messages on websites saying that Gates’ trip was all about giving \$100 million to help India fight AIDS and \$400 million to fight Linux.

In between planting saplings on the Infosys campus in Bangalore and a straight-from-the-gut lecture to software engineers, he struck deals with Wipro for business process outsourcing (BPO). He even went on to say that the two companies could effectively take on IBM. These are big statements coming from Gates which set the Wipro stock zooming. But as of now, that’s the only immediate effect of Gates’ visit. The projects announced will take years to bear fruit. And Gates will be back before that. With more dollars and smiles.

—with Stephen David and Sandeep Unnithan

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