

EC support uncertain

From Malcolm Subhan

BRUSSELS: India's diplomatic mission to the European Community (EC) has just brought out an information-packed brochure entitled "Operation Flood—In India's life and part of it." Its publication clearly has been timed to coincide, as far as possible, with the transmission by the European Commission of its own report on Operation Flood to the EC council of ministers and European parliament, in preparation for a formal decision on Community support for Flood III.

Paradoxically, the brochure is unlikely to win over European critics of Operation Flood, let alone its detractors, although it seeks to answer their criticisms in a factual, matter-of-fact way. Ironically, some of the information it contains is down from the consultant's report of late December, which many critics of Operation Flood believe decisively demolishes the case for continued European support for India's "over-ambitious" project.

The brochure obviously was prepared at the initiative of India's ambassador to the EC, Dr. N. P. Jain. Its introduction, which strikes the only lyrical note in an otherwise sober document, is clearly from his pen. In publishing the brochure the ambassador is hoping to win public support for the Operation Flood in much the same way as he has brought about a change in official attitude here—through an extensive flow of information.

The fact is that since arriving in Brussels a year ago the ambassador has been working hard, much of the time behind the scenes, to ensure continued supplies of skimmed milk

powder (SMP) and butteroil under the Community's food aid programme. He has proceeded on the assumption that once European Commission officials and members of the European parliament are made aware of the integrated nature of Operation Flood, the doubts raised in their minds by partial reports will disappear.

The reliance on the "facts" to dispel doubts and generate support has been successful at the official level. Certainly a fresh Community decision to supply 12,000 tonnes of SMP and 4,000 tonnes of butteroil seemed impossible some seven, or eight months ago; and yet it was taken on July 9. It was preceded by the European Commission's refusal to treat the consultant's report of last December 25 the last word on the subject—although it was the most wide-ranging study of Operation Flood ever commissioned by the EC—and to send its own officials to India this April.

But the brochure is unlikely to end criticism of Operation Flood, whether among the European non-government organisations (NGOs) and academic critics or within the European Commission itself. The fact is these critics are not ignorant of the facts, nor have they been duped by Operation Flood's Indian detractors.

Where critics and advocates of Operation Flood differ sharply is in their perception of India, its development needs and the best way of meeting them.

This is, perhaps, best shown by reference to the brochure itself, which takes up the oft-heard criticism that "too much expensive ma-

chinery has been purchased and too little use made of the abundant available manpower."

The brochure points out that India "can ill-afford backwardness in milk processing technology—The extensive use of modern milk processing technology on a cooperative basis has helped the small dairy farmers to sell their steadily better quality of milk to distant consumption points at higher prices..."

The brochure quotes from last December's consultants' report. "The plant and equipment in all Operation Flood projects visited are of proven international preference and appropriate to the success. The processing technologies adopted are generally of proven international practice and appropriate to the conditions."

The brochure notes that modern technology continually provides members of a cooperative "incentive to produce more milk." It refers to estimates of the World Bank's New Delhi office that each 6 to 10 litres of milk produced in a village require an additional man-day of labour in cattle feeding and care, and that the total employment creation impact of 100,000 litres per day of dairy development is in excess of some 12,000 jobs.

As ambassador Jain has put it "Modern technology may appear to be centralized in the plant at Anand but its benefits are being enjoyed by the farmers selling their milk to it. "And as for employment, Operation Flood is creating new job opportunities in milk procurement, marketing transportation, packaging, distribution etc."