

AUSTRALIA AND INDIA TODAY

Notes for an address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the opening of the "India Today 1994" Festival, Sydney, 17 April 1994

I am very pleased indeed to welcome Vice President Narayanan today at his first public engagement during his visit to Australia

- He is, as Vice President, the highest ranking Indian representative ever to visit Australia.
- He has been a very distinguished Minister, diplomat and scholar in his own right.
- And it is a great honour for us to have him here to open the "India Today 1994" festival.

This festival is all about our joint commitment to building closer people-to-people as well as government-to-government ties between Australia and India

- It is a very important event in the development of our bilateral relationship.

"India Today 1994" has been organised by the Australia India Council to present and promote today's rapidly changing India to Australians from all walks of life, through activities in such diverse fields as business, culture, tourism, education, sport, and entertainment

- As many of you will know, the Australia India Council was established by the Australian Government just under two years ago, in June 1992, to provide a framework for broadening all aspects of our relations with India, and in particular the human ones.
- The Council gives us a specific institutional focus for raising the level of mutual awareness and understanding between our two countries - something that, despite all the ties of history and sporting culture that bind us, had been missing somewhat from our relations over the years, and which the Australian Government believed needed to be redressed.

The "India Today 1994" festival, which is being staged between now and 16 May, is the Council's first really major initiative

- It comprises a number of events designed to promote Australia's growing engagement with India and our diverse and expanding partnership.

- The program will take place in Australia's four largest cities, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

- In addition to Vice President Narayanan's official launch of the festival here in Sydney, sporting teams and cultural performers will visit Australia for the festival; trade delegations will be here as well, and there will be a strong emphasis throughout on how we can bind our economic futures more closely together.

Vice President Narayanan's visit, and this festival, take place against a backdrop of profound change in global affairs, in our Asian region and in our respective countries

- In the past five years, we have witnessed a rapidly changing international environment. This has greatly affected the international framework in which countries have to manage their relations with one another

: Australia and India are no exceptions to this.

- The world is becoming an increasingly interdependent place. Individual national economies are more and more linked together as the desire for the benefits of openness and trade liberalisation overcome gradually the fear at the heart of traditional, inward-looking protectionism

: Australia has been on that path - of embracing openness - for the last ten years, and India is now striding down it with great vigour and determination.

- The successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the establishment of the World Trade Organisation next year - formally agreed by Trade Ministers in Marrakesh last Friday - is not an end to the story but provides an essential impetus for further global economic liberalisation, which none of us can sensibly afford to resist.

- Strategically, the end of the Cold War has brought about a fundamental re-evaluation of traditional associations and relationships - for India, as for others. Increasingly, the trend is towards new regional arrangements embracing trade and/or security interests

: We in Australia are immensely interested in exploring what might now be possible in this respect in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

We in Australia have become acutely conscious in recent years of how much our future

is bound up with the Asia Pacific region: how much we need to develop close and sustained economic and security linkages with countries in this region.

But there is more to Asia than just North East Asia and South East Asia - the Asia of the Western Pacific - and we know very well that there is no bigger nor more important country in the wider Asian region than India. We want very much to give a high priority to the development of deeper and more wide-ranging relations with India

- And we see the changes that have been occurring recently in India itself (in particular the dramatic deregulation and opening up of the Indian economy), as well as all the changes that are occurring in the wider world, as making that more tangibly achievable now than has been the case for many years.

As India's transformation takes root and unfolds, the global business community will become more and more interested in India as a place to invest, to sell products and services, and to produce. And we in Australia want very much to be part of that action, just as we want you to be part of ours.

Underpinning the potential attractiveness of India will be its institutional depth as the world's largest democracy, an advantage India has over some of its economic counterparts in the wider Asian region

- I am talking about the depth provided by a secure, functioning democracy, a well-developed legal system, all the elements of a modern financial system, and very high levels of human resource skills.

Over the next weeks the "India Today" promotion will bring to Australians a better understanding of your great nation and its people

- An understanding of India's enormous potential for rapid economic growth, and the need to develop a strong and creative economic partnership, to the mutual benefit and prosperity of our countries.

- And an understanding of the human dimensions of your country, as ultimately it is people rather than governments that give content to relationships and drive them forward.

I believe very firmly that Australia's people and our business sector have the vision and the capacity to take up the challenge of building stronger ties with India - we have the expertise, the know how and the kinds of goods and services (especially in infrastructural development, energy, food processing, mining and engineering, and

telecommunications) which can contribute to the expansion and greater prosperity of the Indian economy.

During the course of the "India Today" festival, an important new report from the Australian Government's East Asia Analytical Unit, titled "India's Economy: at the Midnight Hour", will be launched by my colleague, the Minister for Trade, Senator Bob McMullan, at a business seminar on April 29 in Melbourne. I believe that the report will contribute significantly to bringing our two countries closer together by identifying and defining for both of us the unprecedented scope for future economic engagement through trade and investment.

For all this forward gazing, we shouldn't lose our bearings with the past: our relations with India go back a long way. In fact, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of official Australian representation in New Delhi

We already have a substantial and vigorous relationship

: India is our fifteenth largest export market, and nineteenth largest trading partner;

: bilateral trade has been increasing steadily - by 30 per cent over the past three years - and is expected to reach some 1.5 billion Australian dollars this year;

: we have a large community of over 100,000 Australian citizens and residents of Indian origin, which contributes significantly to the variety and vigour of this country's commercial, cultural and intellectual life;

: moreover, we already have a long standing tradition of cultural, academic, scientific and of course sporting contacts and exchanges.

- A great many Australians have a long-standing and deep-rooted affection for your country, in many cases - like my own - based on extended travel there in younger days

: my own enormous personal attachment to India stems from the many weeks I spent travelling around it in third-class trains in the late 1960s, and the great many friends I have made there then and since.

I hope and expect that through "India Today", many more Australians will come to know about India, and look beyond our immediate neighbours to the potential and opportunities opening up in modern India

Australians, like others, are perhaps sometimes guilty of not seeing India for the

complex and diverse society that it is, and our perceptions of India are sometimes rooted in traditional and stereotyped images - exotic maybe, but all too often depressing and simplistic.

Through what we inaugurate today, may we start to turn this around and bring home to Australians not only the rich diversity of Indian culture and its ancient civilisation, but also the ever-growing political and economic importance of India in contemporary world affairs.

It is against this background that we welcome and honour the Vice President's visit. I invite His Excellency Vice President Narayanan to open India Today 1994.