WISIT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA MRS INDIRA GANDHI

LUNCHEON AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

22 MAY 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. J.G. Gorton

Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my very pleasant task to propose the toast of our distinguished guest. I think it is impossible for me edequately to express on behalf of myself or of those Australian people who are here, or Prime Minister, who are in their thousands watching you now and waiting to hear you speak -- the intense admiration which we have of you as a person, and the great pride and excitement that we feel in this nation because on this occasion we have been visited for the first time by the Prime Minister of the great Republic of India.

I think that when August comes this year, it will be just twenty-one years since the flag of India flew from the old Red Fort at Delhi, as a symbol of the political independence which had been gained as a result of a struggle of some quarter of a century, a struggle, Prime Minister, in which you and your distinguished family, together with countless other of your countrymen were engaged in, a struggle which occupied all the thoughts of your early life.

I have heard, and you have confirmed to me that the story is not apocryphal, that at the age of three or five or some very early age of that kind, you began to make political speeches standing on a table at the home of your distinguished father, with a captive audience, and I have not only envied you this early start, but I have also had borne in upon me the fact that from that time until the time the flag of free India flew from the old Red Fort at Delhi, you were entirely engaged upon this struggle. In it you lived and breathed and had your being, and in his heady excitement of striving against something, which appeared stronger at the time, for an ideal which you believed, and those with you believed to be more important than the hardships which struggling against it entailed, because you believed that, eventually you achieved that political freedom which for so long you had sought.

It was a struggle, I like to think, Prime Minister - you may not agree with me - not against a harsh, oppressive, overbearing, corrupt power, but against an alien power and one which was in your country, and one which you respected but wished to leave your country so that politically you could run your own lives.

I can only, as from a distance, feel in myself the excitement there must have been, the heady wine there must have been during those years, and congratulate you on having with your countrymen finally achieved that for which you had so long fought. But this was just the beginning, this attainment of political freedom.

That freedom having been attained, then those who had been successful were at once faced with the immensely significant requirements of economic freedom, (for political freedom of itself is not enough) and faced with

immense problems - problems which to a country like ours almost stagger the imagination - of seeking to take and raise the standards of what is now 500 million people in a nation which each year adds to its population, the same number as is the total population of our nation of Australia. Having to build up almost from nothing an industrial base and industrial muscles, having to face in such a vast country the terrific incursions of droughts in particular areas, having to provide for those who having followed your banners toward political freedom, now required some material advancement as a result of having achieved that, having at the same time to provide for the defence of that political freedom and those boundaries of India against incursions which were first feared and then in fact occurred, having all these problems to cope with, you had to show that a democratic country - because through all these times you remained a democratic country - could cope with these kinds of problems and could provide for the citizens of their nation an improving standard of material things.

So from that first struggle, that first excitement of seeking political freedom, these problems came upon your country and in time you became the leader who must decide how best they could be met. During that time, you have managed, Prime Minister in your country to increase the average expectancy of life from 32 years to, I think, 49, you have managed to build up an industrial capacity much greater than that with which you started, you have managed to resist and to repel incursions upon your frontiers. It looks as if you will, in this present plan, overcome the agricultural disadvantages which have dogged you for so long and will manage to be able to provide from within the borders of India the food which India requires.

These are no mean achievements, Prime Minister, and these if they are maintained, as I am sure they will be, will stand as an example to other nations in Asia that great problems can be met by democratic processes, that great problems can be overcome by democratic processes, that there is more than one way to improve and increase the economic well-being of a nation, and that it is not necessary to surrender political liberty in order to do this. If this indeed turns out to be the fact, Prime Minister, then I can think of very little that would be of more significance for the future of the world and the peoples who will live in the various countries of the world.

It is not for me to speak long, Prime Minister, in this, but may I take your mind back to a time when you were left alone because your family were all in gaol, and when you had written to you by your distinguished father a poem, which I know must lose much in translation but which yet I would like to express to you who have not forgotten it and to others who have not yet heard it:

Where the mind is without fear
And the head is held high.
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into
fragments

By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depths of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
perfection

Where the clear stream of reason Has not lost its way into the dreary desert sands of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee Into ever-widening thought and action Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, Let my country awake.

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Prime Minister, the man who wrote that poem did much to see that it was translated into fact. Prime Minister, you are doing much to see it is translated into fact. It is something which your country and mine can both take as something of a guidance for the future, and I wish, Prime Minister and hope, Prime Minister, that for many years to come you will be able to continue to try to see that the sentiments expressed in your father's verse are expressed in actual fact in the country that you lead and that you lead it with the same high courage, political perspicacity, elegance, modesty and grace with which you have led it so far.