

VISIT 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 adequately 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

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.
