



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, 4 OCTOBER 1981

OPENING OF THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION CHANCERY BUILDING

I am honoured to have been asked to participate in this historic and symbolic occasion - and I would like to thank you, High Commissioner, for inviting me to join you at this ceremony.

I am particularly glad, Mrs Gandhi, that your presence in Australia for the Heads of Government Meeting has enabled you to be present at this ceremony. And I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, and your government and people, on the opening of this new High Commission.

Indeed, all those who have contributed to the building of this distinctive chancery, which in its style is so characteristic of India and which so gracefully adorns Australia's capital city, are to be congratulated.

India and Australia have had a long and close relationship. We share a democratic experience and this experience has taught us that with mutual respect and an understanding of the position of others, different interests can be reconciled to the benefit of all. But the warmth of the friendship between our two countries goes further than this, and extends to sporting and cultural links, as well as a wide and increasing range of contacts between our people.

There is an increasing awareness of India in Australia, an increasing exposure of Indian news in Australia media, an extensive interest in the study of India in Australian universities. These and other factors encourage Australian tourists to visit India and to learn more of your country. I would also mention that our two countries have recently agreed to new and attractive air travel arrangements which will give further encouragement to tourism - and I welcome the increasing interest in India by young Australians. The impressions and attachments that young people form through such exchanges will strengthen the bonds of friendship between our two countries.

I have had the pleasure of visiting India on several occasions in the past two years and have seen something of the richness of Indian civilization, and of the greatness of your history and traditions. Australians cannot fail to be impressed by the combination of India's ancient heritage and her contemporary cultural vitality, together, of course, with her impressive advances, often in the face of formidable difficulties, in agriculture, science and industry.

It is also pleasing that the recent high-level mission to India from the Australian Trade Development Council has returned with an optimistic view of the prospects for broadening a number of areas of commercial relationships between our two countries.

And now this splendid new High Commission building brings to us here in Australia a fascinating glimpse of the style and architectural heritage of India. India is clearly a most important nation especially in relation to our part of the world, with a great deal to contribute to the peace, stability and well-being not only of her own region, but on the wider international front as well.

Over many years, India has been a leader in advocating international peace and co-operation. India has spoken with a voice of co-operation and principle, seeking common ground between countries and an enlargement of areas of agreement. As middle-ranking powers we can contribute to international debate and help play a part in the achievement of results which might not otherwise be possible.

Mrs Gandhi, you and I have been - and are - participating in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Today, we have had an excellent example of the way in which the Commonwealth can work to achieve positive action in relation to major issues facing the world. I am referring to the unanimous declaration of the Commonwealth Heads of Government on human poverty and relations between developed and developing countries. This declaration has one over-riding purpose: to express as clearly and as forcefully as possible the joint commitment of Commonwealth Governments to revitalising the dialogue between developed and developing countries. It also aims to achieve a much wider understanding of the massive size of the problems which must be dealt with.

The clear and direct language of the declaration expresses - both to governments and to peoples inside and outside the Commonwealth - the urgency with which we believe these immense human problems must be tackled. Everything which might detract from the clarity of this message has been deliberately omitted. It does not deal with specifics or with practical measures. These will be dealt with at length, and with substance, in the communique at the end of the meeting. The declaration is particularly timely - coming as it does shortly before the North-South Summit at Cancun in Mexico.

The Commonwealth has addressed itself to one of the most pressing and difficult issues facing mankind - and has found a common mind. The declaration of Melbourne is, I am sure, a most significant step in achieving the objectives both Australia and India seek, and I know that we both take considerable satisfaction in its achievement.

Again I would like to thank you, Prime Minister, for having chosen to erect this fine building in Canberra. I am sure that your High Commissioner and all those who will work in these offices over the years to come, will play a significant role in advancing the relationship between our two countries.

Today is an important day for India and Australia, and I am honoured to have been invited to play a part in these celebrations.