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PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
DINNER IN HONOUR OF HIS EXCELLENCY SHRI RAJIV GANDHI
PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA - CANBERRA - 14 OCTOBER 1986

Mr Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, Ministers Shanker and Panja, High Commissioner Ansari, Parliamentary Colleagues, Honoured Guests.

It is my very great pleasure to welcome tonight a leading statesman, the Prime Minister of India, one of the world's great democracies, a man who in less than two years has brought a new vitality and purpose to international relations.

Since coming to office, in tragic circumstances, Mr Prime Minister, you have brought to your position a commitment to facing the realities of our time.

At home you have sought to face squarely and vigorously the problems posed by technological and structural change.

Abroad, you have gained the respect of the international community for your decisive action on a range of issues in multilateral forums - the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned movement, the United Nations.

We first met at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at Nassau in October last year when we had to confront the rapidly deteriorating situation in Southern Africa, the increasing oppression by the South African security forces and the continuing intransigence of the South African Government to countenance meaningful political change.

We met again, in London, to consider what further action was required by the Commonwealth in the light of the Eminent Persons' Group Report and the further deterioration of the situation in Southern Africa. I know, therefore, from my own experience, the wisdom of your counsel and the depth of your compassion and your convictions.

Our efforts, as Commonwealth leaders, to confront the South African problem have since been supplemented by actions taken by the major economic powers : the United States, Japan and the European Community. Your leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement has further spurred international realisation of the need for action if a peaceful solution to this, one of the major moral problems facing the world, is to be achieved.

Our efforts have clearly shown that the moral force which countries such as ours can bring to bear over the rather more self-centred political and economic interests of major powers can be an important force for world prosperity and freedom.

Although India - as a non-aligned country - and Australia do not share identical approaches to foreign policy, we do share the firm belief that the major powers alone are not to be the arbiters of the world's destiny and that others have a constructive role to play.

No one has more clearly demonstrated this fact than you, Mr Prime Minister. Your active involvement in some of the most difficult international issues facing us all has enhanced the respect in which India is held. Whether in efforts to resolve the Gulf War, in your previous capacity as Chairman of the NAM, or as Prime Minister of India, in pursuing the cause of disarmament in the Mexico Declaration, you have demonstrated that it need not be only the superpowers which can influence the international environment.

We are both immediately concerned to promote peace and security in our region. Australia has welcomed the establishment of the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation and India's constructive involvement in it. Australia firmly supports your mediatory role in attempting to bring about a peaceful political solution to the communal problem in Sri Lanka.

For our part, Australians have over the years increasingly begun to see our future in the Asia/Pacific region. Indeed, as I have frequently said it is vitally important to our future that Australia continue to enmesh our economy with the rapidly expanding economies of East and South East Asia, that we accept our full responsibilities in the South Pacific and that we contribute actively to the political and economic wellbeing of the area.

As we are also a country on the Indian Ocean, concerned with regional stability to our west. Australia also has a strong interest in political harmony and economic growth for the countries and peoples of South Asia, of which India is such an important part.

And like India, Australia's foreign policy has more than a regional dimension. We too are concerned about global issues which fundamentally affect prosperity and peace, issues such as the establishment of a more open and fair international trading system and the creation of conditions conducive to meaningful arms control.

At a time when India and Australia are extremely disappointed at the failure of the Reykjavik meeting I pledge the continued efforts of our Government to the pursuit of effective arms control and disarmament, which are central to the aspirations of both our countries.

We hope that it will be possible to build upon the substantial measure of agreement which we understand did emerge at Reykjavik in order to achieve significant reductions in nuclear weapons, leading to their ultimate elimination.

Mr Prime Minister

For over forty years now Australia and India have, as active Commonwealth members committed to the principles of democracy, worked well together towards reasonable and viable solutions of international and regional issues in many forums.

Your visit here gives us the opportunity to readdress our bilateral relationship, a relationship which has the potential to serve, especially, the economic interests of the people of both our countries.

After some years of neglect, I am glad to say that since the two of us have been in Government, there have been renewed efforts to expand our relationship, particularly in developing the potential for economic co-operation between our two countries.

This interest has been stimulated, first and foremost, at Government level. Australia's Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden, visited India in May 1985, a visit followed by that of the Minister for Trade, John Dawkins, in December. Mr Pant, the Indian Minister for Steel and Mines, visited Australia earlier this year.

Your visit crowns these exchanges and I take this opportunity to say that I look forward to making an official visit to India at an appropriate time, to follow up my attendance at the Commonwealth meeting in New Delhi.

The result of these visits has been to bring home to Government and the business community on both sides the practical opportunities which exist for closer and more active co-operation. Many of Australia's largest businesses are now actively involved, or interested in becoming involved, in areas as diverse as banking and investment, ship-building and port development, optic fibre and coal technology.

Your visit here has provided an impetus for us to pursue this potential. During your stay business leaders from both our countries - many of whom I am happy to see here tonight - will be forming the Australia-India Business Co-operation Committee, and a revised Science Agreement which will facilitate projects which could have commercial application will also be signed. I am pleased, too, that a delegation of members of this Parliament will be visiting India next month on a fact-finding mission, which will further enhance the scope for our co-operation.

Australia is increasingly aware of the potential of the Indian market. We believe that Australian technology is immediately adaptable to Indian needs. We both appreciate the necessity, in a world where political decisions increasingly defy economic rationality, to find new markets with old friends.

In our discussions over the next two days we will have the opportunity to discuss these issues further, to set the stage for a new era in our relationship, a relationship that can be much more than friendly, cordial and problem-free.

We can no longer permit our cricketers to set the pace for us, although the historic tie they achieved the other day in Madras provides a model for equality and mutual benefit in international relations.

In our geographic proximity, our strides in economic growth and development, and the traditions and values we share lie the ingredients for closer, more dynamic co-operation.

It has been almost 20 years since a Prime Minister of India came to Australia on a bilateral visit. That has been too long a gap for two good friends.

Your visit is therefore especially welcome, not only to my Government but to the people of Australia who see in you a contemporary, progressive, and, if I may say frankly, courageous leader of a country whose diversity, culture and potential have long captured our imagination.
