



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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I was deeply shocked and saddened to hear the tragic news of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Rajiv Gandhi had already given much to his country as Prime Minister and as an opposition leader. But his murder is particularly sad and wasteful because of his youth, and the continuing contribution which he was in a position to make to India and to the wider world.

I worked closely with Rajiv, particularly in the Commonwealth, where I valued greatly his insights and cooperation on issues such as South Africa.

Australians have particular reason to remember his commitment to our bilateral relationship, of which he spoke again only weeks before his death. That commitment was demonstrated during his visit to Australia in 1986 and in the warm reception we received when Hazel and I visited India in 1989.

Rajiv and his wife, Sonia, were close personal friends. Hazel and I feel particularly the dreadful loss that his wife and family are suffering.

My thoughts and best wishes go to those who must now guide India through this crisis. India's remarkable democracy has endured many challenges in the past. I am confident that the people of India and their leaders will again demonstrate their capacity to overcome the forces that are confronting India's democracy and unity.

I have sent a message of condolence to Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, and Hazel and I have passed our personal sympathy to Sonia Gandhi and her family.

The Government will be represented at the funeral by the Foreign Minister, Senator Evans, and Hazel.

A copy of my message to Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar is attached.

MESSAGE TO INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, MR CHANDRA SHEKHAR

I was appalled to learn this morning of the assassination of Mr Rajiv Gandhi. At this moment of tragedy, on behalf of the Australian Government and people, I would like to convey to you and your fellow countrymen and women our heartfelt sorrow.

Rajiv Gandhi had to assume great responsibilities unexpectedly and in difficult circumstances. He rose to the challenge and made his own outstanding contribution to Indian public life.

I came to know him personally as a friend, and respected and valued him as a constructive colleague in Commonwealth forums.

The vitality of India's democracy has been an inspiration to us all. I am confident that the democratic system in your country will be strong enough to overcome this latest and violent provocation.

Please convey my condolences to the Gandhi family, to your Government and to Rajiv's colleagues and associates.