

## **Australia-India Parliamentary Group**

24 September 2008

Madam Chairperson of the Australia-India Parliamentary Group, the Rt. Hon. Julie Owens,  
Hon'ble MPs,  
Hon'ble Senators,  
All those friends gathered here with an India connection.  
Members of the Indian community in Australia

Pleasure to welcome you all here in the Chancery of the High Commission of India in Canberra. Among all the friends of India gathered here from the Australia-India Parliamentary Group, I would like to especially acknowledge:

Mr. Bob Debus, Minister for Home Affairs  
Mr. Warren Truss, Leader of the Nationals, Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.  
Mr. Andrew Robb, Shadow Minister for Infrastructure & COAG  
Dr. (Ms.) Sharman Stone, Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  
Mr. Luke Hartsuyker, Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs

### **Chancery: Inauguration on 4 October 1981 by Mrs. Indira Gandhi**

Among those here today to meet the India-Australia Parliamentary Group are several friends, Indian and Australian – Darwin, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

We have very eminent academics here who're spent a lifetime studying India. Indian academics who're serving in distinguished positions here in Australian Universities.

We have eminent members of the Indian community in Australia, Presidents of Indian Associations, Associations of Communities from all parts of India – Bengali, Bihari, Tamil, Anglo-Indian, Telugu, Sikh, Malyali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Karnataka. Student Associations; testimony to the great unity in diversity that constitutes India and one of the several bonds that link India and Australia that we are both great and vibrant multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural democracies with proud and deep rooted traditions of parliament, elections that take place like clockwork, both at the national and state level, a freely independent press and a strong and independent judiciary.

It is many of these bonds and the growing engagement between India and Australia across the entire spectrum of interaction that has seen the bilateral relationship grow steadily and significantly over the last several years.

We are no where near reaching the full potential but we are steadily getting there. A series of high level exchanges over the past few years have served to advance the relationship in all areas.

In fact, it is heartening to see tremendous bipartisan support these exists is strengthening the engagement with India. I would like to mention then Prime Minister John Howard's two visits to India, in 2000 and in 2006, Mr. Brendan Nelson's visit as Defence Minister in 2006 and most recently, FM Stephen Smith's visit to India just two weeks ago.

FM Smith's visit came within 3 months of our own External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Canberra on June 23.

FM Smith's visit was a highly successful visit. It came 2 days after the historic consensus decision by the Nuclear Suppliers Group to grant a waiver to India in recognition of its special status and its impeccable Non-proliferation record, so that it can now engage in full international cooperation in civil nuclear energy and commerce. Both Ministers agreed to take the level of relations to a strategic partnership and work towards the objective.

This was a historic decision, important not just to India but to the entire global community of nations for the implications it has for international energy security and sustainable economic developments and therefore for the world.

Mr. Smith's visit, coming as it did barely two days after NSG waiver, aroused intense media interest, especially on the question of uranium sales to India.

It is a sign of the maturity of our relationship and the depth and breadth of our multifaceted engagement that the Australian Government's policy not to sell uranium to a non-NPT signatory did not come in the way at all of what was a highly successful visit.

I thanked Australia for its support in the NSG and the positive and constructive role played by it.

We recognise that the entire question of nuclear energy in Australia and the issue of uranium exports is a complex issue in Australia and within the Labor Party in particular.

At some point in the future, as and when A changes its mind, it will tell us. Till then, we are quite prepared to be patient. There are several other countries we

can engage with on this issue, with whom discussions are ongoing and will probably be concluded over the next few months.

The important thing to note is that the larger bilateral relationship will continue to advance, as it has been doing, over the past several years.

Thank you.

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