

Independence Day Reception

13 August, 2009

Hon'ble Foreign Minister,

It is for us an honour that you have taken the time from an exceedingly busy schedule to grace this occasion with your presence.

India and Australia are two countries whose bilateral relationship rests on the very firm bedrock of shared values and principles. We are both vibrant democracies with long and time honoured traditions of democratic political processes, a free press, a strong and independent judiciary, a deep and abiding respect for the rule of law; We are both multicultural, multi-ethnic countries who celebrate our pluralism and the diversity of the various communities that form the rich and varied tapestry of our respective societies.

We share a common love of cricket and hockey. Both our countries have taken the English language and made it very uniquely our own, each with distinctive imprints.

Just about three months back, India held her 15th General Elections, a democratic exercise that spanned five phases over five weeks, involving 420 mn voters and over a million electronic voting machines.

Our External Affairs Minister Mr. S.M. Krishna was here recently. The fact that he was here within 3 months of taking over as Minister in the new Government indicates the importance that India attaches to Australia and the various aspects of our bilateral engagement, an engagement that grows deeper and stronger by the day.

Mr. Krishna's visit was a successful one. His meeting with PM Rudd and with you, Hon'ble Minister, with the Premiers of NSW and Victoria, and with the Indian community and students, served to reassure India that our students, 98,000 of them, are welcome in Australia and that Australia is committed to their safety and well being, like that of all the international students, who have chosen to study in this beautiful country.

We look forward to working together with Australia in taking our relationship forward; our bilateral trade in goods and services reached \$18bn last year, a growth of 45% over the figures last year, assisted, no doubt by the 7% at which India grew, notwithstanding the global economic recession and the Australia's own economic strengths.

We look forward to the several high level visits that are planned from Australia to India over the next months, and very importantly, to yours. They all reflect the growing engagement between our two countries, in all the several areas of our interaction – at the political level, at the economic level, and at the people to

people level, and above all, they reflect our determination to take the India-Australia relationship to the next level, to the level of a strategic partnership.

Thank You

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