

**SPEECH BY HIGH COMMISSIONER
AT RECEPTION FOR THE INDIAN CRICKET TEAM
HIGH COMMISSION OF INDIA CANBERRA – 12.01.2008**

Hon'ble Minister Senator John Faulkner,

Excellencies, All the honourable dignitaries present, Gentlemen, Ladies

Please join me in welcoming the Indian Cricket team.

Our boys have been here about three weeks now and what an eventful three weeks they have been! We have seen great cricket and an altogether new meaning to the term 'cricket diplomacy'!

A great deal of my work seems to have revolved, especially in recent weeks around cricket. I have been a diplomat for over thirty years now and have been to many parts of the world, but coming here, down under, is truly a great experience. The Test matches gave me the opportunity to speak to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd about Australia-India relations; we look forward to receiving PM Rudd in India in the course of this year. Our Prime Minister too, looks forward to coming to Australia. Now there is just a little matter of getting mutually convenient dates !

These past few weeks, I have been reading the Australian newspapers most assiduously, especially the sports commentaries. I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is for me to see an area, to see a field, where India and Australia are the two super powers, i.e. this magnificent game of cricket.

Prior to coming to Australia, my view of the world as a diplomat has been, to put it mildly, a little different!

We stand at present at a very exciting time in India-Australia relations. It is almost a cliché to state, as we have been stating for nearly sixty years now that India and Australia have several features in common: we are both vibrant democracies, with highly dynamic economies which have seen sustained periods of rapid economic growth in recent years; our countries have a free press, an independent judiciary, and multi-racial, multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural societies.

The Indian cricket team here today is a magnificent example of what the new India is all about – the team members come from all regions, religions and backgrounds. They speak diverse languages and are truly representative of the best in our country – a deep and abiding respect for traditions, for values, and for skills.

India has grown to be Australia's fourth largest export destination; last year Australia's exports to India grew by 34% and India is Australia's fastest growing market for its service sector exports. Tourism is one of most promising areas; our Department of Tourism, which joins us in welcoming all of you here today, is actively engaged in promoting tourism to India.

India is in the middle of a process of profound socio-economic and political change. We are working in India today towards nothing less than a transformation of our economic and social landscape. In this endeavour, we

constantly break new ground - there is no precedent in human history for a democracy of over one billion people moving towards development and prosperity.

Gentlemen, Ladies,

India and Australia are not countries that are far away from each other, but countries that are in each other's extended neighbourhood. And here I would like to quote from what Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said last month:

Quote

Western Australia looks naturally to the Indian Ocean. When the sun sets in the West, it sets on the Indian Ocean, not the Pacific.

I believe it is essential to ensure that Australia looks to our important neighbours and partners to our west. India's remarkable development only encourages me to bring us closer together. I look forward to working with the Indian Government and the Indian people to add depth and vigour to our relationship.

Unquote

I think this augurs well for the forthcoming Test Match at Perth!

Then, besides all the values we have in common, we also share a language. It is a language which each of us, you here in Australia and we in India have taken and made a language of our own, with its own slang, idioms and idiosyncracies. It is a language, the nuances of which Australians and Indians sometimes understand differently from each other, perhaps. It is a language that for most of us in India is still only a second language; many of us still tend to think and articulate in our respective mother tongues.

Then there are of course the three 'Cs' that link our two countries - Cricket, Curry and the Commonwealth. Many observers believe that India-Australia relations should move beyond the three 'Cs'. As for me, I think that if our two countries can engage as intensely with each other at all levels in all other areas as we intensely as we do on the cricket field, then I see a great future ahead for India-Australia relations.

And we will all be winners.

Frankly, after the seven days of cricket that I have watched over the past few weeks, I'm not sure what I should say of cricket -whether its just a game; or whether I will ever say again of cricket that it is just a game;

I suppose one could say both, depending on the circumstances?

Or perhaps the most accurate description is that Cricket is a religion that both our countries share.

A few weeks back, I spoke at the launch of a publication on Australia-India Business, where I ended with a reference to the game of cricket. I said that doing business in India was not a One-day or a 20-20s match; it was a Test Match in the noblest traditions of the game. At times, it can be long drawn and there are times when nothing seems to be happening at all; but well played, it can be an exhilarating experience for everyone concerned.

Before I end, I will take just a few more minutes of your time to tell you about a very interesting Bollywood film called LAGAAN. LAGAAN means Taxes and this film is set in pre-independence India in the British Raj. A poor village is asked to

pay heavy taxes in a year of drought; they don't have the means to do so. They see the British playing a game called cricket and offer them a wager. If they learn the game of cricket in a month and defeat the British team in a Test Match then they need not (almost as long as a test match!) pay the taxes; if they lose, they will pay double; it's a long film - 3½ hours; there are many songs and dances and a lot of cricket; and you don't know what the result is till the last ball is bowled.

I think I would like to take further advantage of this captive audience to touch on the other sporting links – other games where Indians are taking part in Australia.

The Australian Open in Melbourne has started. India's Sania Mirza is one of the exciting young players who will be playing there.

In hockey, the Indian Women's Hockey team has arrived in Canberra for ten days to practise with Australian teams and prepare for the Beijing Olympics qualification round. You will remember that it won silver at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, where Australia won gold.

The March 2008 start to the Formula One Season in Melbourne will see the debut of the Force India Team in the F1 completion the first time that an Indian has put a car with an India flag on the Formula One grid. We ourselves hope to host the Formula One in India in 2010.

The Force India team was introduced in Mumbai yesterday even as the Indian transnational company TATA made history in Delhi by unveiling the World's cheapest car – the Nano! TATAs, of course, have been supplying Ferrari with cutting edge software for the Formula One for a number of years now.

In 2010, Delhi will host the Commonwealth Games, which were last hosted by Melbourne in 2006. Work is proceeding at breakneck speed to finish modern stadia, highways and the airport in our capital.

There are other areas where we excel. In Women's cricket, for the first time, the ICC Woman Cricketer of the Year in 2007 has gone to an Indian: Jhulan Goswami. Then we have the World Champion in Chess – Vishwanathan Anand.

To end, it is conventional to say that cricket is a common passion for Indians and Australians. Sometimes of course there is a little too much passion than we are comfortable with, but the beauty of the game is that we all go back to playing and enjoying it.

I would like to thank all of you here today for being here with us to celebrate a great and magnificent game.

We look forward to an exciting summer ahead of us.

Thank you.
