



AUSTRALIA'S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO INDIA DELIVERS A LECTURE IN IIPA

Australia is a modern successful multicultural nation

Australia has long valued the significant contribution successive waves of migrants have made to building our nation. Today, Australia is one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world—with an estimated 30 per cent of the Australian population born overseas.

We have achieved this success by welcoming and integrating people from many cultures. Keeping Australians together in an increasingly polarised world is a high priority of the Australian Government.

We encourage and support new arrivals to actively contribute to Australia's economic prosperity and growth as a country, and in return, take full advantage of the economic and lifestyle benefits Australia has to offer.

We do this by providing a range of support services to eligible migrants and new arrivals to integrate into the community and fully participate in it.

Like India, Australia celebrates diversity, and values its democratic institutions as the bedrock of our cohesion and strength as a nation.

The Indian diaspora is central to this story

The Indian diaspora is a particularly important part of our success. It is our fastest growing diaspora community – and occupies a special place in Australia's success as an open, diverse and dynamic nation.

You may find it surprising to learn that 1 in 35 people living in Australia claim Indian ancestry. Hinduism is our fastest growing religion, and Punjabi our fastest growing language.

People of Indian origin have lived in Australia since at least the 1800s.

Migration from India significantly increased in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Two-third of overseas-born Indians have arrived since 2006. This makes Indian-Australians some of our newest Australians.

India is also Australia's largest source of skilled migrants and the second largest source of international students, representing around 17 per cent of Australia's total international student cohort.

The pandemic has been an extremely difficult time for international students, who are an important part of the Australian community. We look forward to welcoming them back to our classrooms, campuses and communities, when conditions allow in 2021.

Indian-Australians have integrated successfully into Australian society - socially, economically and culturally.



H.E. Hon'ble Barry O'Farrell AO



They contribute to all facets of Australian life - in the fields of engineering, medicine, academia, politics, art and culture and information and communication technology. And this contribution is not surprising given their immense talent - Australia's Indian-born population is almost three times as likely as the wider Australian community to hold a bachelor's or higher degree.

The early 2020 bushfires across Australia, quickly followed by the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, saw Indian communities in Australia show a great sense of civic responsibility.

During the terrible bushfires, members of Indian Australian communities provided outstanding support to our firefighters and those who had lost their homes and livelihoods, by distributing food and other essential items.

During the height of Australia's COVID-19 lockdowns, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim community leaders ensured that accurate information was conveyed to community members, helping stop the spread of COVID-19 in Australia.

There is no doubt in my mind that Australia is stronger and more resilient because of the contribution of the Indian diaspora community.

And this is set to continue with Australia's new *Global Talent* Program.

The idea is simple. We are looking for marquee businesses and exceptionally talented individuals to come to Australia. We are offering:

- Facilitated relocation of executives, critical staff and their families
- Fast tracked visas with a streamlined pathway to residency, and
- Connections to essential industry and professional networks.

This program offers opportunities for the continued growth of the Indian diaspora in Australia, the benefits of which we know flow strongly to both India and Australia.

India too is stronger through its ties with Australia.

Many Indian alumni from Australian universities return to India and make notable contributions across various domains in India. Be it education, biotechnology, agri-business, agricultural research, sports, creative industries, health, science, innovation and technology, civil society and government, sustainability and design, Australian alumni are scaling new heights in India. Many continue to engage with their mentors and institutions to further the co-operation.

Through our New Colombo Plan, the Australian Government also supports young Australians to study, live and work in India at various educational institutions or organisations. This initiative sows the seeds of long-lasting friendship and cultural familiarity.

Once established, people-to-people links are bridges of understanding and critical to any relationship. Initiatives such as the Australia-India Youth Dialogue and the Australia-India Leadership Dialogue are examples of regular forums where people can keep on engaging in regular dialogue on issues critical to both our nations. This ongoing exchange deepens our understanding of each other's culture and reality.

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But the Australian Government recognises that to further strengthen our relationship we need to better understand each other. To support this objective, Australia is investing about Rs 80 crore (AUD 14.2 million) over the next four years to enhance the business and education relationship, including a mapping and research exercise on Indian diaspora in Australia.

The more we know about each other, the more we can do together.

And it has driven Australia-India relations to a historic high

Our mutual understanding is already bearing fruit.

The Australia-India relationship has never been stronger. Our friendship made great strides in 2020. It is based on our shared values and outlook, our open economic and political systems, and our interest in maintaining a region governed by rules, not power.

Last year's Virtual Summit between Prime Ministers Modi and Morrison elevated our relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). The CSP has cemented India at the forefront of our international partnerships.

It is our job as public servants to deliver our respective leaders' ambition - to increase the depth, breadth and complexity of the bilateral relationship.





The CSP gives us a practical framework to do so - to guide collaboration in areas like science, technology and space, defence and maritime security, and health. The CSP also provides us with new opportunities to work together on public administration, governance and broader economic reforms.

And what a pace we have been setting. To support the CSP, we have implemented eight new MOUs in areas spanning defence, cyber cooperation, critical minerals, education, science and governance. And our ambitions don't end there - we already have plans for deepening engagements in areas such as health and telecommunications.

We haven't let COVID and travel restrictions impede our ambitious agenda. Our experts have collaborated in 12 virtual joint work groups since the Virtual Summit on topics as broad as water, agriculture, education, customs practices and countering terrorism.

In coming months, the India Australia Circular Economy Hackathon - a two-day virtual event held simultaneously across Australia and India will see participants learning first hand from industry experts - creating new ideas to rethink how we manage materials and waste.

We have also launched the first round of the Australian-India Cyber and Critical Technology Partnership grants program, which will deepen practical cooperation on cyber and critical technology issues. And we also hope to commence the India-Australia research workshop series in 2021 and hold the Australia-India Energy Dialogue.

Our defence cooperation is at its highest point in history, with more collaboration and activities than ever before. The activities are becoming ever more complex - aided now by our new Mutual Logistic Support Arrangement.

We were pleased to accept India's invitation to participate in Exercise MALABAR in November 2020. Defence exercises like MALABAR are key to enhancing Australia's maritime capabilities, building interoperability with close partners like India, and demonstrating our collective resolve to support an open and prosperous Indo-Pacific. It showcased the deep trust between four major Indo-Pacific democracies and their shared will to work together on common security interests.

While political leadership is obviously important in nation-to-nation relationships, nothing could be achieved without the specialised expertise, skill and efforts of our public sectors.

As a former Chief Minister of Australia's largest State, I often reminded my Cabinet Ministers that we could not run the State or implement the programs and initiatives we hoped would improve lives, living standards and opportunities for our citizens.

For that we relied on our advisers - your equivalents in our national and state public sectors. I urged my colleagues to empower their departments. To encourage them to have high ambitions, to consult widely, to study the issues we were tackling, to assess all the options - and then present their best views for consideration.

Once Cabinet decisions were made, we then looked to these same officers to implement the policies. And as important as the decision-making process is, the enactment of policies is even more critical, especially 'the last mile'.

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So, one of the reasons I jumped at the chance to speak to you today was to make clear that good government is a partnership between the public's elected representatives and their public officials. You - and your colleagues in New South Wales (abbreviated as NSW) is a state on the east coast of Australia and Australia - have critically important responsibilities in ensuring the success of your states and nation.

You represent a diversity of professions, and your efforts, excellence and acumen are crucial to the success of our post COVID world.

In both Australia and India, our-political and public sector - colleagues are stepping up to deliver what I see as a historic whole-of-government effort to deliver a shared vision for the region - an open, free and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

Our friendship, and the ties between us, have real benefits.

It is not just our governments that are working together. Our think tanks and academics are working closely together too. And this is also important because neither Cabinet rooms nor departmental offices are the repositories of all wisdom. Good government requires us to reach out to all those who can contribute to better governance.

In October, we saw the release of a joint report on critical technology. This ground-breaking analysis, by leading Australian and Indian experts (all women) addressed the essential role that critical minerals play in developing the technologies that are key to advanced manufacturing, global prosperity and security. The report recommended that our countries invest in building a new India-Australia partnership on technology which could stimulate regional momentum in a range of key critical and emerging technology areas.

Continuing that theme, in December 2020, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs announced the establishment of the Sydney Dialogue on emerging, critical and cyber-enabled technologies. The Dialogue will help to drive global discussions on the technological advances that are shaping our economies, security and daily lives. This year's inaugural dialogue will highlight the important role India plays in driving these global trends.

Recognising the global leadership role India is playing in so many areas of international relations, the Lowy Institute - one of Australia's premier independent think tanks - interviewed Dr Jaishankar in December 2020. More than 17,000 people listened in to the podcast, as Dr Jaishankar covered a wide range over topics including India's place in the world, its relationship with China, the impact of COVID-19, and the India-Australia connection.

We have partnered too on our COVID response

Given the year that was 2020 and all of our roles as officials of our governments, I wanted to touch on the one issue that has shaped our lives over the past 10 months - COVID-19.

Domestically, Australia and India's federal structures have required us to adopt unique approaches, as we coordinate across governments. In both our countries, key responsibilities for different parts of the health and economic response are shared between respective tiers of government.

As a former chief minister, I have been proud of the cooperative approach between our federal and state governments.

Early in the pandemic, Prime Minister Morrison established a 'national cabinet' to ensure effective coordination and information-sharing between the Prime Minister and state and territory premiers and chief ministers.



In turn, the national cabinet has been advised throughout by expert sub-committees, made up of top experts in a range of fields, ensuring that decision-making has always been informed by the best advice available. This innovative approach has contributed to Australia's success in containing the virus—and Australians know your colleagues there, as here, were crucial in combating the pandemic.

Australia and India have also been putting our closer partnership into action to address COVID19. We have recognised the strengths the other brings to the table. And I am pleased with the strong coordination and information-sharing that has occurred between Australian and Indian officials throughout the pandemic.

Internationally, COVID-19 has reinforced that Australia's security and prosperity is tied to that of the wider Indo-Pacific. Our foreign secretaries have participated in regular coordination calls on the COVID-19 response in the Indo-Pacific with like-minded partners.

And we have seen remarkable leadership from India since this crisis began in the region and globally - whether it be in being a 'pharmacy to the world', through vaccine rollouts, calling for a global response through the G20 or as an early voice advocating for reforms to the World Health Organisation.

These regionally and globally focused steps are consistent with the increasing international leadership role we've seen India take in support of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

Australia and India are working together on our post-COVID recovery, to help each another and to help our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region. Vaccine cooperation and logistics is the next step in demonstrating what we can achieve together.

Conclusion

Indians and Australians are working closely together every day, discussing and debating the critical issues of the day and finding solutions to the challenges facing both our countries and the Indo-Pacific region.

As External Affairs Minister Jaishankar said in his address to the Lowy Institute:

"How Australia and India sit down and think about our region and the world is consequential for both of us and the world. We both need to think beyond the space for middle powers. We have a window to do more between one another and in the world. And Australia and India will play a very important part."

As you return to your respective agencies following this program, my humble ask of you is to keep Australia in mind as a partner on a wide range of endeavours. The coming century brings with it a host of new problems, which we can only solve together in partnership. And then, only with the ongoing efforts of you and your colleagues across the Indian central services. ■

(H.E. Hon'ble Barry O'Farrell AO is Australia's High Commissioner to India. This writeup is his commentary delivered during the 46th Digital APPPA Participants on 'The Indian Diaspora and the Australia-India Partnership' dated January 29, 2021 coordinated by IIPA Faculty, Gadadhara Mohapatra.)