



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

India

SPEECH

Monday, 2 June 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Plibersek, Tanya, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11:30): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

- (a) the decisive victory in India's recent national election of the Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Shri Narendra Modi;
- (b) India's achievement in building secular, democratic government since independence in 1947;
- (c) the continuing improvements in living standards of the Indian people over recent decades; and
- (d) India's growing role in international affairs; and

(2) calls on the Australian Government to move promptly to build a strong relationship with the new Indian Government.

The victory in this month's Indian general election of the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, presents great opportunities for India, for Australia and for Australia-India relations. It was a remarkable victory. It was remarkable for Mr Modi himself. As a child and teenager, he sold tea with his father at a railway station in the western Indian city of Vadnagar. Now he is the leader of the world's largest democracy. The size of Mr Modi's victory was remarkable. His is the first government to have an outright majority in the Indian lower house since the election of 1984. His victory brings a big change in the complexion of Indian politics. There has been a shift away from the Indian National Congress, which has dominated Indian politics for almost all the years since independence in 1947. Mr Modi has a real opportunity, but as the leader of a country of 1.3 billion people, he also faces huge and daunting challenges.

Growth in the Indian economy improved after the reforms that began in the early 1990s, but in recent years economic growth has slowed. India's GDP per person is one-tenth that of the United States and half that of China. Mr Modi will be working to narrow that gap. I hope he can promote growth in ways that benefit all Indians. Mr Modi's victory brings opportunities for Australia. Australia and India share values of democracy and the rule of law. We have strong historical links and a common language. Ties between the people of Australia and India have been growing rapidly.

There are 450,000 Indian migrants in Australia, our fourth largest migrant community, making a wonderful contribution to Australian life. India is our largest source of permanent and skilled migrants. Tourism has been increasing. Last year there were 169,000 visitors from India to Australia. Diplomatic and strategic links with India strengthened greatly during our time in government. A joint declaration on security co-operation was agreed to by Prime Minister Rudd in 2009 and Prime Minister Rudd and Prime Minister Gillard made successful visits to India. Our ties with India are strong and they can grow and deepen further.

The India country strategy that was part of Labor's *Australia in the Asian century* white paper said that out of all our major relationships, the one with India had the greatest potential to continue to grow. The strategy sets out ways that India can help Australia become more productive and resilient through greater trade and investment. It says closer people-to-people links, continuing migration and increasing travel will benefit both countries. India has a long tradition of support for multilateral cooperation and the white paper says we should work together to strengthen such dialogue.

I urge the government to take up the opportunities identified in the white paper to deepen our relationship with India and to make it a priority to build strong relations with India's new government. It is economically, culturally

and socially a country with which we have many existing links but there is potential to deepen, strengthen and broaden those links, in part because of the very significant Indian diaspora here in Australia but also because of the firm footing on which the previous prime ministerial visits have placed the relationship. It is an opportunity Australia should not miss.