

It is a pleasure to be here with you today. My wife and I have looked forward with great anticipation to this trip, our fifth visit to India. It has become wonderfully clear to me over the years why India has, for centuries, fired the imagination of people around the world.

It is a special pleasure to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished group of businessmen, government officials, and journalists. I speak to you today not only as Canada's Transport Minister, but also as a representative of a government which has placed very high priority on its relations with India. Prime Minister Mulroney and Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, have, in numerous public statements and private discussions, emphasized the Canadian government's commitment to expand and intensify its relations with India. We have been most satisfied that the Indian government shares this commitment and that our mutual efforts have already begun to produce significant results.

India is both a major Asian power and a principal leader of the non-aligned movement. Its role in international diplomacy has grown and its importance in international affairs is commensurate with its deep experiences and recognized expertise. The challenges it faces are shared by many of the countries of the world, and India's innovative responses are watched closely by the global community. Canada has long been an admirer of India's achievements and we continue to value greatly Indian views on a wide range of international issues. India matters to Canada.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Vancouver last October provided an excellent example of how our two countries joined forces to tackle a particularly important and contentious international issue -- apartheid in South Africa. We are often in agreement on the major issues of the day: but even where we disagree, our discussions are marked by respect and understanding for the basic considerations which underlie our respective policies.

A catalogue of interests can explain why we have to talk to each other, but does not explain why we enjoy doing so. There is a special warmth to the Canada/India relationship, a deep friendship which goes back over many years. Prime Minister Nehru and Canada's Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent early on established a relationship based on deep admiration for each other. Their friendship established a pattern for successive leaders in both countries; it is evident today that Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Prime Minister Gandhi have also established a highly personal rapport.