

It is indeed a pleasure to be here this evening to talk to you about Canada's commercial relationship with India, and more specifically, about my recent visit to that country. First of all, let me say that the enthusiasm I see here - and witnessed in India - reflects the positive direction of Canada-India relations.

In March I travelled to India, accompanied by a delegation of over 40 Canadian business leaders, and I was most impressed with what I saw. As Canada's Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, I have visited many countries in this immense and varied region. What struck me most during my trip was the remarkable progress of India's program of free-market economic reforms and the potential this offers for Canadians, who already enjoy such profound historic ties with India.

These linkages form a strong foundation on which we can build a more mature bilateral relationship across a whole range of activities, with the greatest emphasis being on our mutual economic and commercial opportunities.

We should now be putting all our energy into enhancing this friendly and constructive relationship. You may well ask how this is to be achieved. The answer lies in our commonality of interests, our shared aspirations about the future and our shared membership in the broader community of Asia-Pacific relations.

Canada and India have had diplomatic relations for almost half a century, with a history of bilateral co-operation that predates India's independence. We have been partners in various multilateral fora, including the Commonwealth, United Nations peacekeeping operations, and now the new World Trade Organization. We have enjoyed close bilateral ties in the area of development co-operation since the days of the Colombo Plan.

On the human side, over half a million immigrants have come to Canada from India since the turn of the century. Many Indians have come for higher education (and I hope more students and scholars will come). Still many more visit Canada each year for business and pleasure. The Indo-Canadian community has contributed to Canada's rich and diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious mosaic. Canadians of Indian origin, whether representatives of big companies, or entrepreneurs from our dynamic small and medium-sized business sector, can contribute to the national effort we need.

They will add empathy to our Indian ties, the level of cultural affinity so long of benefit to our North American and European links. Much of our success in realizing our aspirations in business will have to do with the success we have in linking our peoples.

The Indo-Canadian community has maintained and nurtured its ties with India, and successive Canadian governments have encouraged