



India Independence Day celebration Lexus of Indooroopilly Friday, 15 August 2008, 6.30pm

The Hon P de Jersey AC
Chief Justice

Professor Singh, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am immensely honoured to propose, on behalf of the State of Queensland, a toast to President Pratibha Devisingh Patil, and thereby, to the 1.2 billion people of the great Indian republic.

We do not need to be reminded, especially with this our quadrennial dose of Olympic fever, which is the most populous of our international neighbours, that is of course China, and we are all delighted that China is hosting, with such conspicuous success, the 29th Olympics. India comes second in the population stakes – and those stakes are huge. But as with China, the significance of India is not dependent on population numbers. India's significance derives from the force of its people, people who, imbued with the rich traditions of a great land, have consistently challenged their international neighbours and co-citizens of the world to achieve a more refined understanding of the overall human condition.

I was greatly privileged to visit India last October, as a guest of Chief Justice Balakrishnan and the Supreme Court of India. I was again – that being my third visit – reminded of features of the Indian nation which would be frankly incomprehensible to the vast majority of Australians: the capacity of a country which occupies only 2.4% of the world's land mass, to support more than 15% of the world's population; the very concept of a nation embracing more than one billion people – we Australians have a mere .024 of a billion; the capacity of the Indian body politic to acknowledge, and seek conscientiously to serve, the dramatically contrasting demands of a populace so diverse; the vibrant spirit of an Indian nation so distinctive on the one hand for its diversity, but united in its dedication to the principles Mahatma Gandhi so compellingly proclaimed.



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As tonight we acknowledge India, as we celebrate our Australian relationship with that great nation, and Queensland's greatly important link of its own, it is good to recall one of Gandhi's statements, this one about the importance of good mutual relationships: "The evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side".

Our Consul and host, Professor Singh: it is my honour in this context, on behalf of the people of Queensland, to propose a toast to the people of the Republic of India, and to that end in an immediate sense, to their Head of State, President Patil.

Ladies and gentlemen, "President Patil and the Indian Republic".