

Doorstop at the Taj Palace

PRIME MINISTER:

I'll be meeting again with Prime Minister Modi in a moment, as we take the Australia-India relationship to new and higher levels. It is growing all the time, strengthening cooperation across so many fields.

I talked at the Press Club about opportunity and security, and the opportunities here for Australian exporters including, of course, exporters of raw materials, coal, energy products, but also education.

This is an enormous education market for Australia and we have six of our vice-chancellors here. It represents nearly \$2.5 billion a year for Australia in terms of exports. There are 60,000 Indians studying in Australia and Prime Minister Modi wants to train 400 million Indians over the next five years, so he has got a massive task, a massive objective, a huge ambition to upskill the people of India and there is a big role for Australia to play in that. We are the second most preferred destination for Indian students to study abroad after the United States, and that is a huge vote of confidence.

So our university leaders are here, the Education Minister Simon Birmingham is here and we are going to build on that very powerful relationship.

Also – security. We'll see today a commitment to closer cooperation on counter-terrorism, on countering people smuggling and human trafficking.

Opportunity and security, going hand in hand.

Each of us have a vested interest in maintaining the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific, maintaining a strong united front against terrorists, against people smugglers, against those that seek to threaten our way of life.

So this is a vitally important relationship.

India is an extraordinary achievement. So diverse – had never existed as a single nation before 1947, 22 official languages, all the religions of the world, 11 different writing scripts and yet one nation here in India, created since 1947 – an extraordinary achievement and growing now at over 7 per cent per annum, the fastest growth rate of any comparable large country.

Prime Minister Modi is leading his country to new heights and we are very pleased to be here, to support that and to collaborate, to cooperate to the greater benefit of both Australia and India.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, the trade relationship needs a push along, and one of the things that the Indian side has been raising is something they want is easier rules on 457 skilled foreign worker visas for their people. Is that on the table? Is that an option for that trade deal?

PRIME MINISTER:

We see our temporary migration program as being conducted in a very focused way in Australia's national interest. And our commitment and our determination is to ensure that obviously where jobs can be done by Australians, they're done by Australians. Plainly, every nation has that objective. But where there is a real, a genuine shortage of skills then we can bring in skilled persons from overseas and so a great many of those have come from India, it is a very, very talented population, but everything we do will be focused on our national interest.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Turnbull, do you see any obstacle in Australia knocking off the US as the number one provider of education services to India and especially as the boffins and university people here this week are saying one of the catalysts could be curbs on student visas by Theresa May and sort of general Trump-ism scaring off Indian students in the US, [inaudible]?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well look it is, the education market like every other one is competitive, there's no doubt about that and it says a lot when you consider relative size of Australia and the United States.

The fact that we are second only to the United States in terms of being a destination for Indian students says a great deal about the way Indians view Australia and the way they view our educational institutions.

So we are competing with other countries for international students. It is a competitive market and as you know we love competition, we like free trade, we like open markets, we're committed to them.

JOURNALIST:

PM, are you going to meet Mr Adani and what will you say about the rail link to the port that Adani wants supported?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm looking forward to seeing Mr Adani again. I've met him before, of course. As far as the rail link is concerned, if you're asking about the Adani's interest in securing funding from the Northern Australian Infrastructure Fund, that's an independent process – it has to go through that process, through that independent assessment by the board.

JOURNALIST:

John Clarke aimed fun and his wit at prime ministers – how does the Prime Minister today reflect on the passing of John Clarke?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it is a huge loss. You know, he had, he had one of the keenest eyes. He understood us, all of us, not just prime ministers but all of us better than anyone. He was much more than a satirist. He had an insight into the Australian soul and he could cut right to the heart of the issue, he could demolish the pomposity, the absurdity of politics and of the, you know, the great and the good if you like, and do so in a way that left everybody laughing, including the victims of his genius.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister you talked about security between, security issues being discussed today – will you be discussing energy security?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

JOURNALIST:

With that I mean obviously Australia is a supplier of natural gas, uranium and coal –

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

JOURNALIST:

Will that come up?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, we will be, we'll be discussing all of those issues. Prime Minister Modi and I have a similar view on energy which is all of the above. Obviously India is in a very different position to Australia in terms of its development and its enormous need for more electrification but India is pursuing every technology. As indeed is Mr Adani by the way – his company owns the second largest solar farm in the world which is here in India.

We are committed to all of the above, all of those technologies, we support them and we play a big role in it, obviously as a big coal exporter to India, as we're now in a position to supply uranium of course, but in addition to that just remember this that most of the world's solar cells contain Australian technology.

Australia has been one of the leaders of photovoltaic technology. So, this extraordinary technology and you know, we saw how important it was in PNG in a different context, how important solar is. So it's a very big agenda of Prime Minister Modi's and of course we're very pleased to be able to support that.

JOURNALIST:

Open markets, what is the best case scenario in terms of a free trade agreement, a time frame and would you like to see it happen and when do you think it is [inaudible]?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it is a process that will take some time. You know, India has a long tradition of protection particularly for agriculture. From our point of view of course we are a huge agricultural exporter so we want to have open markets, open markets for everything but in particular for agriculture. So it will take time but the important thing is to persevere and I think that you can see the trade between our two countries is growing all the time. There are more opportunities arising. We've talked about energy, we've talked about education and of course other services. Indian tourism is growing in Australia as well. So I am confident that as we build on those people to people links, remember there is half a million Australians of Indian background and it's the largest single part of our migration program nowadays, so the Australia-India connection is very, very strong. And it will get stronger and it's built not just on meetings between prime ministers but on thousands if not millions of connections between Australians and Indians.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think it's actually possible to overcome those sticking points? On the one hand the agriculture and on the other the labour mobility given that we have had two years now where we've been told the agreement would be finished by the end of the year.

PRIME MINISTER:

We will pursue it, we will pursue continued growth in trade between Australia and India. There is no point setting a target for an agreement without having regard to the quality of the agreement. You can sign an agreement anytime it's a question of whether it's got the provisions that make it valuable and worthwhile from Australia's point of view. The big agenda in terms of trade in the region now is RCEP and that's I think the priority that the ASEAN countries, India, Australia and China and others are giving today.

JOURNALIST:

Are we still trying for a free trade agreement?

PRIME MINISTER:

The CECA as it's called is yes, it is certainly on the agenda and Prime Minister Modi and I are committed to continuing work on that but again I wouldn't, I think we've got to be realistic about timing and it is important to make sure that you have an agreement that meets your requirements – you're not just reaching an agreement for the sake of being able to say we've reached an agreement – it's important to be able to reach an agreement that provides real additional avenues for Australians. But I've got to say, the trade is growing very well, we are seeing real progress. This is a country as you can see around you in a state of rapid transition. The positions and the

attitudes on trade of 20 years ago are not those taken in India today and they will change in the future as the nation develops as its economy transforms.

Now on that note I must leave you.

Thank you all very much.

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