

India: Australia's Elephant in the Room

Asialink article following public lecture by Chairman Emeritus of the Australia India Council, Neville Roach on August 19, 2008.

India accounts for \$11 billion of Australian exports and is predicted to become Australia's second largest trading partner by 2050. Chairman Emeritus of the Australia India Business Council Neville Roach, who was awarded the illustrious Bharitiya Samman Award from the President of India this year, gave a stirring public lecture at Asialink in August, urging Australia to look at four areas of concern; energy resources, the treatment of Indian migrants, students and tourists in Australia, the creation of an Australia- India Institute and cricket trends.

India is a cricket-obsessed nation of 1.1 billion people and underwrites the game, generating about 70 per cent of total global revenue. What happens on the cricket field affects all aspects of the Australia-India relationship. Mr Roach spoke of escalating cricketing tensions escalated this year after the now infamous Sydney Test. To appreciate the intense emotion it engendered in India, he said, think of Australia's reaction to Bodyline. While the crisis might seem to have passed with the advent of IPL 2020, it acts as a warning of tensions simmering beneath the surface.

"Sledging is widespread, including by Indian players, but most agree modern day sledging is an Australian creation," said Mr Roach. "Cricket Australia has always been soft on sledging. It is time Cricket Australia and the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the two dominant powers in world cricket, adopt a 'zero tolerance' for all forms of abuse. Importantly, this needs to happen in the next two months before Australia tours India in October."

Mr Roach also expressed concern at Australia denying India sales of uranium, which is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

India believes it has as much right to nuclear power status as the five countries recognised by the NNPT and lives in a tough neighbourhood. "It is worth noting a number of NNPT signatories have not honoured their obligations of nuclear disarmament yet we happily export uranium to them..." , said Mr Roach, who added India had a desperate need for nuclear energy to lift hundreds of millions out of poverty and combat climate change.

Mr Roach said it was important for Australia to increase a quiet dialogue on uranium.

Mr Roach was a key player in the Australia 2020 Summit, proposing the creation of an Australia-India institute to increase the dialogue and understanding between the two nations and he urged the University of

Melbourne with Asialink to give the opportunity arising out of the summit serious and urgent priority.

Mr Roach outlined a vision of India becoming Australia's most significant supplier of human resources as our population ages but warned we will face stiff competition for the resource from other western nation.

He advised lowering trade restrictions with relation to wages in the Australian IT industry for four-year visa holders and encouraged Australian business and government to offshore further as the balance of trade between the two nations was very much in Australia's favour.

He urged education insitutions to ensure they provided quality services to Indian students studying here and that Australians give more thought to providing vegetarian food for students, tourists and migrants.

Mr Roach said interntionally outdated perceptions of Australia as 'White Australia' still persisted, driven by Hansonism, the Cronulla riots, Othe Hanif case and boorish behaviour on the cricket field.

"We have to promote Australia as the best place in the world to live, work, play and bring up children."

Mr Roach outlined the extensive history of engagement and occasional misunderstanding between India and Australia and his love for both nations and outlined an optimistic future for both.