

Australia India Leadership Dialogue 2015

Cabinet ministers, senior bureaucrats, members of Parliament, business leaders distinguished academics and leading journalists from both Australia and India came together in New Delhi in October 2015 for the inaugural Australia India Leadership Dialogue. The Dialogue, held from the 25th to the 27th of October 2015, discussed the prospects for the Australia-India relationship, and how it can be strengthened further.

The Dialogue's co-patrons, Anthony Pratt, Global Chairman of Visy Industries, and Anand Mahindra, Chairman and Managing Director of Mahindra and Mahindra first welcomed the 50 delegates. The co-chair of the Dialogue, Professor Amitabh Mattoo, of the Australia India Institute, told the group that although the idea of an Australia-India relationship had now arrived, for any such idea to come to fruition, a platform was needed where intelligent and creative conversations could take place. The AILD, he said, aimed to provide just such a forum, where thought leaders from both countries could discuss and enrich one of the most important partnerships of the 21st century.

The discussions that followed over the three days of the Dialogue covered a host of issues, including domestic politics, trade, services education and the security architecture for the Indo-Pacific. Many delegates expressed optimism about the potential of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) currently being negotiated by New Delhi and Canberra. Officials from both sides were confident the negotiations would conclude soon.

The dialogue's other co-chair Ross Fitzgerald said, the centre of global economic and political gravity is shifting to the Indo-Pacific region and working with India offers the greatest opportunity in the world to make a difference. It is in this context the AILD is an important

initiative wherein the two countries with shared values and a trust-based relationship can work together in maximizing the economic opportunities and minimizing the security risks

With more than 60,000 young Indians now studying in Australia, education is a central point of contact between the countries. Three areas came in for particular mention: student mobility, research, and vocational training. The delegates agreed more effort should be put into setting up collaborative projects, scholarships, and training programs.

On infrastructure and investment, delegates agreed that India, with its favourable growth structure, is one of the region's best markets in which to invest at the moment. They were also of the opinion that India should replicate the investor model of Australia, which is very sound, and Australia should share its knowledge to help best practices for investors in India. In mining too, Australian companies could help Indian mining companies to increase their productivity by making them familiar with modern technological practices.

Research and development was identified as another areas where cooperation between the systems in the two countries has enormous potential. This is especially so in agriculture, where new technology could deliver long-term benefits to farmers to in both countries. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) already



[L-R] Senator The Hon. Lisa Singh, The Hon. Chris Bowen MP, Senator The Hon. Penny Wong, The Hon. Gai Brodtman MP at the Australia India Leadership Dialogue

shares with developing countries in the Indo-Pacific its expertise in productive, sustainable agricultural practices. Given the large capacity of India's research systems, similar collaborative innovation arrangements should be developed in other fields within the public and private sectors of India and Australia.

Members of Parliament from both countries agreed there is strong bipartisan support for stronger Australia India relations. The AILD was seen as providing a great opportunity to strengthen the relationship further. They expressed the hope that both Prime Minister Turnbull and Prime Minister Modi would carry on the good work of their predecessors and continue to build on this very important relationship.

Lastly, delegates reflected on the Dialogue itself. The Dialogue was seen as a forum, which would make discussion possible among public

intellectuals in India and Australia on the very nature of leadership. It might allow the elaboration of an idea of leadership, which is collective and distributed through multiple social networks. It might draw young people into the conversation about leadership, and the nature of power and its distribution, and might thereby lead them to think about the importance of making economic growth inclusive.

Delegates acknowledged the rich history of the Australia India relationship, and the substantial place India occupies in the Australian psyche. They applauded the substantial nature of the dialogue, which had taken place, and the goodwill of those who believe in the Australia-India relationship, which, they felt, would enable bilateral relations at all levels to grow and strengthen.