

Canada-India Business Council

January 13, 1996
New Delhi, India

On behalf of Team Canada, I am pleased to attend this special meeting of the Joint Business Council. The JBC and the Canada India Business Council are doing important work, bringing together business leaders and providing useful advice to governments.

India and Canada have a long history of cooperation and shared values. We have shared a commitment to democracy, unity in diversity, respect for the rule of law, and membership in the Commonwealth.

Back in the 1950s, Prime Ministers Nehru and St. Laurent were close personal friends who co-founded the Colombo Plan to help the newly independent nations of the Commonwealth with their economic development. At that time, Canada was one of the top three suppliers of imports to India. Later, our cooperation in the United Nations and other organizations has strengthened the bonds between us.

Over the years, Canada's aid program in India has funded over 10% of India's hydro-electric capacity.

It has provided the opportunity for thousands of Indian scholars to train or study in India, and funded the planting of over 190 million trees in wasteland areas.

Canada, as the saying goes, was "present at the creation" -- at the creation of the modern Indian state.

But as we all know, in recent decades, that relationship did not continue to develop and grow. There were real reasons for that. But the price was a friendship on hold. And both our countries paid that price.

That is why Team Canada is here in India. To give our relationship the injection of energy and dynamism it needs. To renew our friendship at a time of dramatic changes in both Canada and India.

For much of our history, Canada has focused its attention on our relations with Europe and the United States. We were a colony first of France, and then of Britain. Most Canadians were of British or French ancestry. For many years, the United States and Europe were our most important trading partners. We tended to look across the Atlantic rather than the Pacific.

Over the years, however, Canada has changed a great deal. Canadians have recognized that we are also a Pacific nation, and they are celebrating the opportunities this presents.

The most recent statistics show that Canadians of British and French origin are less than 50% of our population. During the last decade, the Asia-Pacific region has become Canada's largest source of immigration, and our second largest trading partner, after the United States.

There are now half-a-million Canadians of Indian origin, making important contributions to business and public life in Canada.

They are also making a very important contribution to our expanding relationships with India and other Asian nations. In fact, as part of the Team Canada delegation with us today are two Members of Parliament who were born in India: Herb Dhaliwal and Gurbax Malhi.

When our government took office in November 1993, I appointed Raymond Chan as Canada's first Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific to acknowledge the rapidly growing importance to Canada of this region. He is also with us today.

I am very honoured to be accompanied on this trip by most of Canada's provincial premiers, federal government ministers, and hundreds of Canadian business leaders.

Our Team Canada approach aims to show the world, and especially Asia, that Canada's federal and provincial governments are working cooperatively with each other and with our business community to strengthen our trade and investment ties abroad.

Canadians are very excited by the opportunities they see in the dynamic Asia-Pacific region. And they are excited also by the bold liberalization policies they see taking place in India. We congratulate your government for its vision in pursuing these reforms.

Canada fully supports these efforts and encourages India to continue in this direction. To a large degree, it is these reforms that have served as the catalyst for the increased economic and commercial cooperation between our two countries.

We know that the economic challenges to be met in a country of 900 million are massive. And the energy and gusto with which Indians have seized these challenges are making a deep impression on us.

For example, in my discussions with Indian leaders, they have told me of their efforts to end the tragedy of child labour and the economic exploitation of children. Canada, like other countries, is trying to assist with a number of specially-focussed development programs. And, of course, all of us must work to alleviate the poverty and underdevelopment that is at the root of this horrible problem.

Many in the business community are meeting this challenge. The Rugmark logo is an important example of an effort to crack down on child labour.

So are the efforts of a number of Canadian companies to specifically prohibit child labour from being used in any goods they import.

We in the Government of Canada are open to looking at new ways to combat child labour through toughening our own import restrictions.

And, of course we are deeply committed to supporting the economic growth, the development and literacy and education efforts that will ultimately eradicate this scourge.

This area is an example of how increased trade and commercial ties... how increased links across the board can improve lives in both our countries. And that is really what Team Canada is all about.

Government and industry in Canada have worked together to develop a new strategy called "Focus India." This strategy will coordinate the efforts of our federal and provincial governments with the private sector to take advantage of new opportunities.

Business activities will be supported by high-level visits both to and from India, as well as seminars, workshops and other initiatives.

And the results are clear. In the first 8 months of 1995 there was an increase of 64% in Canadian exports to India, as well as an increase of almost 25% in Indian exports to Canada.

According to the Indian Ministry of Industry, Canadian investment in India in the first six months of 1995 increased eight-fold over the same period in 1994. In fact, Canada is the fourth largest direct investor in India.

All this has set the stage for this Team Canada mission with its impressive grouping of provincial premiers, federal ministers, and hundreds of business leaders representing some of Canada's most prestigious and successful companies -- companies which are eager to work with Indian businesses to expand trade and investment.

Many of these companies are from the energy, telecommunications, environmental services, agri-food, financial services and transportation sectors. These are the main areas where we believe we can expand our trading relationship. These companies want to forge relationships that will take our commercial interests to a new, higher plateau.

Already we see many examples of this. Earlier during my visit I witnessed the signing of agreements between Canadian and Indian companies worth \$444 million. There were many different kinds of agreements -- large and small, in many different sectors.

Some were statements of intent, letters of interest, memoranda of understanding that pledge future collaboration and future benefits for both parties.

These agreements will generate jobs and economic growth for both Indians and Canadians for many years to come.

That is why today, I want to announce a new goal for trade between our countries.

A goal I outlined to your government leaders during our talks. A goal that I would like to put out as a challenge to you, the business leaders of both countries.

I believe we can and we should double the two-way trade between Canada and India over the next two years. And that over the next five years, we should quadruple our trade.

With our dynamic economies, with our know-how and common values, with our commitment to liberalized trade and to jobs and economic growth, these goals are more than do-able.

The quality of life of our people in both countries demands we do it.

I believe our Team Canada visit has laid a foundation to build on. To build new, stronger connections between our countries. To build a new renaissance in India-Canada relations. A partnership that improves the prosperity and quality of life of the citizens of both countries.

And I believe that just as we look back to the decades following independence as the golden days of our relationship, in the decades to come, we will look back at Team Canada and this mission, as the turning point to a new era of cooperation between our countries.