

30 August 2003 – Inauguration Function



The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Australian launch on Saturday 30 August 2003 by the visiting Hon. Mr. Yashwant Sinha was a smashing success. Attended by 250 leading Australian citizens of Indian and non-Indian origin, the launch of the 7th international centre, in the Grand Ballroom of Sheraton on the Park, showed that the multicultural nature of the Bhavan and its activities is truly under way. Among those present were Philip Green, Director of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Alexander Downer and Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous

Affairs, Phillip Ruddock; Laurie Ferguson MP, Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs; Michael Abbott QC, Chairman of the Australia India Council; Dhirubhai Mehta, Executive Secretary and Director-General of the Bhavan internationally; R. S. Rathore, High Commissioner for India; M. Ganapathi, Consul-General of India; and Mr. Neville Roach, Chairman of Australia India Business Council.

The program commenced with a famous Indian poem, Vande Mataram, sung by Australian-Indian artist, Pushpa Jagdish, which was a salute to the rich cultural traditions and long struggle for independence of India. The President of the Australian Bhavan, Mr. Gambhir Watts then spoke about the primary role of the Bhavan as a cultural and educational vehicle to promote cultural harmony in Australia by raising awareness of the diversity of our Indian and Australian ways. He emphasised that while the Bhavan would hold aloft the best of Indian traditions, he also spoke of the debt Indian-Australians owed to the country that had provided a second cultural and spiritual home for them. He wanted to transform and expand the landscape of Indian-Australian cultural relations and make the Bhavan's name synonymous with cultural diversity. Mr. Dhirubhai Mehta, Executive Secretary and Director-General of the Bhavan internationally, came to Sydney specifically for the launch. He spoke of the Bhavan as an international cultural ambassador, because it used art, music, culture and education to "sweep away cobwebs of ignorance and fill minds with divine sparks of wisdom." He added that the Bhavan had been recognised for its achievements through the high-profile members and donors it attracted, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Royal Highness, Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan, Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton, Bill Gates and others.

The Minister, Yashwant Sinha began by saying that he readily agreed to the Launch because he was honoured to be given the opportunity to give back to the Bhavan, an organisation that had contributed to the cultural and educational life of India in many ways. He went on to say that the computer education centre the Bhavan ran in his own rural electorate had changed the lives of many and offered hope to a disheartened youth in India. Mr. Sinha also talked about the importance of the Bhavan in creating and maintaining deep cultural ties with non-Indian Australians, particularly as the two countries were moving closer together in trade and economic relations. He gave the Australian Bhavan his blessings and hoped to come back next time to see how the Bhavan had progressed. The Minister also launched the Bhavan's first cultural project, Sandesh, a CD of the poems of the Indian Prime Minister and poet, Atal Behari Vajpayee, which has been set to music in Australia.



Laurie Ferguson and Philip Green both spoke of the Bhavan's role in ending cultural misunderstandings and gave its activities their whole-hearted support.



Michael Abbott QC, emphasised the apolitical and secular nature of the Bhavan as aiding the cultural understanding amongst Australian citizens. He also hoped that the Bhavan could work alongside the Australia India Council in promoting intercultural understanding of Australian and Indian cultures.

Finally, Mr P. A. Ramakrishnan, Co-ordinator of the Australian Centre, but based at the Headquarters in Mumbai, talked about the critical role some members of the Bhavan's Board had played in registering the Bhavan on 1 July 2003, and organising

a successful pre-launch and now launch within 2 months. He went on to say that the real work now lay ahead in carrying these crucial tasks of intercultural harmony and participation. He hoped to be able to secure support and perhaps funding from the Indian and Australian governments for the Australian Centre.

Guests expressed their appreciation for the event and considered it a great success. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan generated a great deal of enthusiasm and support for its initiatives, including opening a cultural centre by 2006. The cream of the Australian and Indian business and cultural community has vowed to become involved in the Australian Bhavan's activities and to promote its work internationally.