

# PM delivers remarks in Brampton

Brampton, Ontario  
12 August 2014

Prime Minister Stephen Harper today delivered the following remarks at India's National Day Gala in Brampton:

"Thank you very much.

"Good evening.

"Namaste.

"I want to thank everybody for that warm welcome and just tell you how delighted I am to be here.

"Thanks of course to our masters of ceremonies, to Parm Gill and Angie Seth for kicking us off tonight.

"Also special greetings to all guests from all levels of government who are here with us tonight, both Canadian and international, to Consul General Mishra.

"Particularly to my colleagues from the Government of Canada, and I know they've already been introduced.

"There are way too many for me to name but look we've got a great turn out.

"I'd like them all to stand up one more time.

"Give all my colleagues from the Parliament of Canada your warm greeting.

"You will know ladies and gentleman that our Government has, in fact we're proud to have, eight Canadians of Indian descent serving in our caucus.

"In fact, there are today more men and women who were born in India serving in Canada's Parliament than at any other time in our country's history.

"Let me also just recognize a few people who worked so hard to make this occasion such a tremendous success.

"Obviously first, my introducer, for her leading role in helping to drive the organization of this great event – she asked me 67 times to attend – let's give her one more round of applause, my introducer, Dr. Senator Asha Seth.

“Now to be fair, the Senator was working with a great team, so let’s also show our appreciation once again to the other members of the Canada India Friendship Group and to members of the Advisory Board.

“Thank all of them for their great work in putting this tremendous event together.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, I know tonight we’re a couple of days early but I would like to personally wish each of you, I would like to in fact wish all Indo-Canadians a very happy India Independence Day.

“In a matter of days, Prime Minister Modi will do, for the first time, what each of his predecessors have done: raise the deep saffron, white and green flag of India above the Red Fort in New Delhi.

“So, on behalf of the Government of Canada and indeed, I know, all of the people of Canada, let’s extend our best to Prime Minister Modi and the Indian people as they mark 67 years of independence.

“Now ladies and gentlemen, Canada’s relationship with India is special because despite the great differences between our two countries, we have growing economic ties, we have vast people-to-people ties, and all of these things are cemented together by common values: democracy, justice, pluralism, peace, human rights, the rule of law.

“And in what is a very uncertain and divided world, it is comforting to know that Canada has certain friends, like India, who share these values.

“Now ladies and gentlemen, in preparation for tonight’s event, I could not help but reflect on how much has changed here in Canada and around the world since my first visit to India back in 2009.

“Five years ago, our Government was navigating Canada through the midst of the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression.

“Indeed, much has changed.

“With regards to the global recession, whereas Canada was the last G-7 country to feel its impact, we have been the first country to recover from it.

“And today, despite challenges and uncertainties around the world – challenges and uncertainties that do continue to impact us – Canada’s economy is strong, it is growing, creating good jobs and opportunities for hard-working Canadians.

“There are more Canadians working today than at any time in our country’s history.

“Today, Canada is also widely rated as the best country in the G-20 in which to do business.

“We have the soundest financial sector in the world.

“And we have the most prosperous middle class, among significant developed economies.

“We have lowered taxes and, next year, years ahead of other countries, we are going to balance the budget here in Canada.

“Now thinking again back to my trip to India in 2009, Canada then had free trade agreements with only five countries in the entire world.

“Since then, we have expanded that by almost 10 times.

“Today, we have free trade agreements, agreements in principle, with 43 countries.

“Put another way, Canada has secured free trade agreements with nearly a quarter of the world’s countries, and Canadian businesses are going to have tariff-free access to more than half of the total global economy, including, as you know, with the European Union and the Republic of Korea.

“Now it’s my hope – it’s our Government’s hope – that over the years to come Canada and India will continue to develop our own economic and trading relationship.

“And that is, of course, another area where things have changed greatly since 2009.

“We can rightly say that the chill that characterized relations between Canada and India for decades is a thing of the past.

“Before our Conservative Government came to office, Canada’s relationship with India had been essentially frozen for most of the period since the 1970s.

“Since taking office our Government has worked hard to revitalize and strengthen Canada-India relations.

“We have concluded a Social Security Agreement, an historic Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, and we have launched our own bilateral Canada-India free trade negotiations.

“Know that our Government will continue to work to break-down barriers that hinder bilateral trade and investment, and that senior members of our Government will continue to visit India.

“Just a couple of years ago I had the great fortune, as the Senator mentioned, of returning to India.

“Because one trip was obviously not near enough to even to scratch the surface of that large, ancient and fascinating civilisation.

“In fact, my second trip to India was the longest bilateral visit any Canadian Prime Minister has ever made to any country in the world.

“And we have been following up on that – we now have eight Canadian consular and trade promotion offices operating across the Republic of India, a number we are looking to add to.

“These offices are helping to facilitate visa and immigration applications, and they’re helping to create more opportunities for Canadian businesses in places such as New Delhi and Bangalore, Chandigarh in Punjab, and Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

“The state of Gujarat in particular – the state where Prime Minister Modi served as chief minister for more than a decade – is home to some of the brightest and best entrepreneurial minds in the world.

“Our Government sees tremendous potential for growth in collaboration with this regional economic powerhouse and we have been working hard to make this a priority for several years.

“Canada was pleased to serve as an official partner for Vibrant Gujarat 2011.

“And two years later, at Vibrant Gujarat 2013, not only did Canada serve as an official partner, but Minister Jason Kenney travelled all the way to Gujarat to represent Canada at the summit and to address all of its attendees.

“Ladies and gentlemen the bottom line is this: the bottom line is that the friendship between Canada and India is stronger, it is stronger than it has ever been and that is something that we all, in both of our countries, should be very proud of.

“Now ladies and gentlemen you should also know that our Government’s efforts to strengthen Canada-India relations go beyond expanding bilateral trade and investment, for example, through immigration reform.

“Canada’s past has been shaped by the millions who came from elsewhere and Canada’s future will depend on the millions yet to come.

“Yet, for far too long, previous governments, as you know, chose to ignore problems in Canada’s immigration system as if they would just fix themselves.

“Instead, the problems only intensified and the wait times got longer.

“Back then, if you had applied to become a permanent resident from India you could expect to wait five or six years for your application to be processed.

“It was that bad.

“As the immigration backlog grew, so too did the irritation of those patiently waiting their turn.

“Worse still, economic opportunities were denied not just to individuals from India, to immigrants, but to Canada itself.

“When our Government took office, we immediately got to work and tackled those problems head on.

“And I should tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that our Government’s reforms have been working and they have been working well.

“Today, the permanent residency approval rate for applicants from India is more than 85 per cent.

“I should add that these men and women don’t have to wait another four or five or six years for their residency because our Government has reduced processing times for recent applicants down to just one year.

“In 2005, fewer than twenty-five hundred student visas were granted to Indian students.

“Last year, our Government granted more than fourteen thousand such visas.

“More Indian students than ever before are studying at Canadian universities, and because our Government has made it easier for these bright young minds to qualify for permanent residency and to work, we hope these students, many of them, will stay and put their Canadian degrees to use right here in Canada.

“Our Government has also made the CAN+ program in India a permanent feature of our immigration system, meaning that persons who have travelled to Canada or the United States in the recent past can be fast-tracked for a visitor visa.

“Our CAN+ program has a 95 per cent approval rate, making more Indians able to visit Canada as tourists or to do business.

“By the way, did I mention ladies and gentlemen that this newest change to our immigration program was just announced by Chris Alexander last month in New Delhi, during his first trip to India as Canada’s new Minister of Citizenship and Immigration – congratulations!

“Look we all know that immigration enriches this country, and our Government’s ongoing reforms mean that more immigrants will be able to contribute to their maximum of their capacity, and that is good for everyone.

“Today, India is Canada’s top source country for immigrants.

“And of course, this explains why Canada’s Indo-Canadian community is more than 1.2 million strong and continuing to grow.

“The Indo-Canadian community has a proud and rich history in our country.

“This community – the Indo-Canadian community – is comprised of ordinary people doing extraordinary things in business and in finance, in academia and medicine, in technology and agriculture, to list just a few areas.

“I want to give you just one example.

“Close to ten years ago, Naval Bajaj came to Canada from India with only \$600 in his pocket.

“But he had big dreams, and he had energy and ambition.

“And ladies and gentlemen, in Canada, he also had opportunity.

“With hard work and determination, Naval eventually became a business consultant with 7-Eleven Canada and he is also a business owner himself.

“He has led two trade missions for Canada back to his home country.

“And he was the youngest ever elected president of the Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

“He also happens to be a member of the Canada India Friendship Group Advisory Board.

“Now ladies and gentlemen, I tell you that in my travels across Canada I meet many people like Naval.

“Men and women relentlessly pursuing their goals to build a better, more prosperous life for themselves and their families, and helping this country immensely in the process.

“In fact, I know that this room is full of people just like that.

“In my travels, I have also observed that wherever Indian immigrants settle, wherever they choose to put down roots, to start businesses, to raise families, be it Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, Toronto or right here in Brampton, not by coincidence, those places thrive.

“I believe this is because Indo-Canadians possess a strong ethic of work and education, and an unwavering commitment to faith and to family.

“And these are the things that underlie not only the Indo-Canadian community’s success, but Canada’s success as a country as well.

“So look, let me just conclude tonight – I know you’re all anxious to get on with the meal – let me just conclude by taking this opportunity to thank each one of you.

“To thank all of you for choosing Canada.

“Thank you for contributing to Canada.

“Thank you for loving Canada.

“Because whether you’ve been here for one, 10 or 50 years, Canada is your country.

“Again, congratulations everyone on this tremendous event, and thanks once more for the invitation.

- See more at: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2014/08/12/pm-delivers-remarks-brampton#sthash.0IqkgW8e.dpuf>