



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN OPEN GLOBAL BALLKID PROGRAM LAUNCH

Friday 28 September 2018

Rod Hilton, Australia's Deputy High Commissioner to India

Anil Kumar Khanna, President of the Asian Tennis Federation

Praveen Mahajan, President of All India Tennis Association

Yong Kim, Executive Director of Kia Motors India

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Ballkids

It is a pleasure for us to be back in India, for our second official visit now within the last year.

This visit reinforces to me just how much Australia and India have in common, and the areas fertile for our collaboration.

As the Governor of Victoria, I am particularly aware, and proud, of the strong people to people connections that we share.

Victoria alone is home to 200,000 citizens of Indian origin – the largest number in Australia.

Tourist numbers between us are rapidly rising. And long-lasting bridges are further built between us, thanks to the 40,000 or so Indian students who come to study with us each year.

Your young people learn about our culture, and in turn, our students learn more of yours'. Life-long friendships and future business relationships are thus forged: never more importantly than now, in this globalised environment.

We are blessed not only by a commonality of needs and opportunities, in areas as diverse as education, health, med-tech, water management and urban planning, but also by our common passion for sports. Indeed, for many of us, it is not just a common passion. More, a shared 'obsession'!

We are left in no doubt as to the place cricket holds in the heart of this nation, as well as ours'. (And so, we can look forward to the Test Match to start in Melbourne on Boxing Day). But we know that you also love field hockey and soccer and badminton too, and Kabaddi, (which is fast becoming a very popular import into Australia). Of course, we know you love tennis, and that your success on the international stage is growing.

Victoria has been sports mad since its earliest days.

The Melbourne Cricket Club was founded in 1838, when Melbourne was in its infancy. The MCG – the 'G' as it is affectionately known - was built shortly afterwards.

Similarly, our beloved indigenous game, Australian Rules Football, was born soon after the State of Victoria itself, as was our famous Melbourne Cup horserace (which has its own public holiday).

That historical love has translated into a city and State of major sporting events. Cricket, horseracing and Australian football have been joined by major soccer, rugby and golf events as well as the annual Formula One Grand Prix.

And, of course, the Australian Open Grand Slam, held in Melbourne, each January.

The Australian Open has been held for more than 110 years.

It resides in its own, purpose-built facility – the National Tennis Centre – adjoining the MCG, in the heart of Melbourne's central sporting precinct. It features more than 30 tennis courts, and, across the tournament, attracts almost 750,000 spectators, and tens of millions of viewers worldwide, including in India through broadcasting by Sony.

The January 2019 Australian Open will see an exciting new initiative: Tennis Australia's Australian Open Global ballkids program.

The program will enable one thousand children in Indian schools and clubs to participate in a Ballkid training program. They will have the unique opportunity to learn 'ballkid' skills, and up to ten lucky youngsters, aged between 11 and 17, will be selected to represent India at the Australian Open 2019.

What wonderful Ambassadors they will be for your country and what a special connection will be forged.

Some may be encouraged to join the rising ranks of Indian tennis stars like Yuki Bhambri the previous winner of the Australian Open Junior title, or Sania Mirza.

Some may be inspired by the events or stadia management expertise to which they will be exposed. Or, the exciting sports technology - for high performance and sports analytics - that they will see all around them during the experience. (Including from your own INFOSYS that has just announced a 3 year partnership to work with the Australian Open).

And some youngsters may just be encouraged - and may encourage others - to be more active, or to participate more in tennis or in other sports and activities, when they return home.

The Victorian Government and the Australian High Commission have together supported this innovative program in the firm belief that it will further strengthen the personal connections between us, and build the trust and mutual understanding that will foster the best shared future for all our young people.

We are so delighted to be able to join you today to launch the Australian Open Global Ballkid Program in India, and we look forward to welcoming the selected youngsters to Melbourne.