



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **SPORTS DIPLOMACY RECEPTION**

**Friday 28 September, 2018**

**Ms Michelle Wade**, Victorian Commissioner for India

**Mr Richard Bolt**, Secretary of the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources

**Ms Penelope McKay**, Executive Director of Economic Strategy in the Department of Premier and Cabinet

**Distinguished guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

My husband, Tony, and I have been fortunate enough to visit India as tourists in the past, and now have the privilege to be undertaking our second official visit within a year.

We are grateful for the opportunity afforded to us this evening by our Victorian Trade and Investment Commissioner to gather you together to join us this evening.

It is apparent to us that Australians and Indians together 'speak the same language' in so many different ways. And our mutual love of sport is a particularly strong example of that.

In fact, in sports-mad Victoria, I think it is one of the important links between us. Perhaps it explains why the largest Indian community in Australia resides in our State!

For balance, I should briefly add that there are other reasons too!

Victoria is not only the fastest growing State, so that Melbourne's population will shortly overtake Sydney's, but we are also a noticeably diverse community, with people from more than 200 different countries. Around 200,000 citizens of Indian origin certainly add to that rich diversity, which we see as a great strength.

There is also a genuine complementarity when it comes to a range of sectors that include education, health, med-tech, transport, water management and 'Smart Cities', digital technology and innovation.

And that brings me back to sport.

Of course, we share both a love of, and an equally competitive spirit, when it comes to cricket.

The prestigious Boxing Day Test in Melbourne, later this year, will provide the best canvas for that competition, and a terrific opportunity for a parallel Indian cultural festival to be enjoyed in the sporting precinct.

The Cricket Australia Documentary of which we will shortly have a glimpse sets the scene for us.

But although India's love of cricket is legendary, your sporting prowess and interest definitely extends well beyond that. You have enjoyed repeated success in Olympic Field Hockey. (Again, there is enthusiastic competition between our nations). You love soccer and badminton. Tennis. And your indigenous game of kabaddi is gaining traction around the world.

Let me try to briefly explain just how fundamental our love of sport – all sport – is in Victoria.

The Melbourne Cricket Club was founded in 1838 – when Melbourne was just three years old! The MCG – the 'G' as it is affectionately known - was built shortly afterwards.

The first game of our beloved Australian Rules Football was played when the State of Victoria had not long been formed (in 1858). Even today, with a national League of 18 Clubs, ten of them are located in Melbourne.

The famous Melbourne Cup has been run since 1861. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when only 290,000 people lived in Melbourne, 100,000 attended the race! We even have a public holiday for its running every year.

That historical love has translated into a city and State of major sporting events: not only in cricket, Australian Rules football and horseracing, but also in the Australian Open Grand Slam tennis, Formula One Grand Prix, soccer, rugby, and golf. And it has translated into crowds of 80,000 to 100,000 regularly attending events.

What that has meant for us has been the need to develop major sports infrastructure and sophisticated event and stadia management.

The MCG is famous, but it is in a precinct with other major football, rugby, soccer and mixed-use stadia, the Tennis Centre and running and training tracks.

Our love of everything sporting has also meant that Victoria has become the sports technology hub in Australia for high performance, sports analytics, equipment and playing surfaces, as well as the centre for governance, media and professional and educational services.

There are already collaborations between India and Victoria in some of these areas, but I know that we also share two other major interests when it comes to sport.

One relates to broadening sports participation.

I was previously on the governing body of our Australian Rules Football, the AFL Commission. Our responsibilities went beyond just the support of the elite competition, to ensuring the growth of the game at grass roots level and encouraging mass participation.

As the Governor of Victoria, I have extended that ambition to encouraging participation in all sports and activities. We have major community health initiatives that are successfully encouraging girls and women to participate in exercise, as well as boys and men, and those of all abilities.

I think that is something dear to you too in India.

It is wonderful that India will host the Deaf Cricket World Cup in November. We are proud that Australia will be included.

Otherwise, we clearly share an understanding of sport's capacity to help us build the people to people connections that will in turn underpin other important aspects of our relationship.

We can see the links already.

The Indian diaspora has gifted us the game of Kabaddi. The participation and competitions are growing, and I know that big crowds will gather in April 2019 to watch the Sikh Games in Melbourne, which are supported by the Victorian Government. I know too that our Australian Rules Football officials have been learning from you as to how you have so successfully internationalised this exciting game.

Already there have been discussions that I hope might mean greater exposure of AFL football in India. And I am pleased that the Richmond Football Club – from Victoria – is running Aussie Rules footy programs here across three cities, for 3,000 local youngsters to enjoy.

Today we launched Tennis Australia's Australian Open Global Ballkid Program as part of the 2018 Australia Fest here. It will enable one thousand children in Indian schools and clubs to participate a ballkid training program. Up to ten lucky youngsters 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.

Another special connection – I should add – is the partnership recently announced between Infosys and the Australian Open – a great example of corporate links between us.

So, that leaves me only to say that it is a pleasure to have you with us this evening. May the strong rivalry on sports fields in our two countries, and elsewhere, continue between us. And may the strong friendship and collaboration that we enjoy off the fields, courts and pitches also continue and flourish.