

There's much more to our Indian relationship than curry, cricket and English

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Date: 25/01/2008

Source: The Age

Section: Business

Page: 10

Australia will be left behind if it does not lift its game, writes Stephen Manallack.

IT SEEMS many in business and government feel the recent fallout over cricket will not have a negative impact on trade with India - more evidence of our relaxed, "she'll be right" attitude to South Asia. Even if this approach was right in the past (when the Indian economy was in the doldrums of the 2-3% "Hindu rate of growth") it is now time to wake up to the reality that this is a fast-moving, exciting and dynamic economy and it can pick and choose its trade relations because the world is chasing business there.

Consider, for example, that British Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently spent two days in India and he pledged \$US1.6 billion (\$A1.8 billion) to help with development for the poor. How much did our Trade Minister, Simon Crean, pledge during his recent visit? In light of the Brown commitment, plus the angry cultural clash over cricket, ask yourself: how well will an Australian company go if competing tomorrow with the British?

With all things relatively equal, you can guess which country will get the nod. You can add to this negativity the Indian view that as an energy-starved, growing country, a global example of democracy at work, it is deeply concerned that we happily sell uranium to countries it regards as "suspect" while refusing it to them.

In other words, if we think we are mates with India simply because we both speak English, play cricket, are members of the Commonwealth and enjoy curry, then think again. We have to do more to show our friendship, and some of our cricketers are good role models.

What should we be doing to break down this cultural divide?

First, we should be flat out campaigning to get more Indian tourists here. They now have the money, and a campaign for tourism would also communicate our culture to the broader Indian public. Let's get Australia on the billboards, on cable TV and in the cinemas - and let's make the visa process quicker and simpler.

Second, we need a co-ordinated approach to support India's efforts to help the poor - and this might mean government and business working together to do our bit.

Third, reinforce our intellectual property and leadership in the twin areas of high demand over there - health and education. But we have to make sure our house is in order, with many Indians feeling that courses here are substandard.

Fourth, take initiatives to exchange knowledge and services in waste management and waste disposal - we are pretty good in this, with some of the cleanest cities in the world, and Indians are about to wake up to the fact that rubbish is taking over their country.

Fifth, create ways we can work closer on sustainable energy (and accept that for us this inevitably opens the issue of uranium and nuclear energy).

Sixth, make sure Indians are aware of our global leadership in fields such as wealth management, a growing need over there.

Seventh, provide cultural training to Australians in all fields who are to visit India, so that our blundering around (which we often see as down to earth and friendly) does not continue to cause offence or confusion among our hosts.

As has so often been the case in his career, Sachin Tendulkar provides the role model for all of us in dealing with India - he is quiet, friendly, quick to smile and displays enthusiasm while keeping an ability to concentrate despite diversions (sledging has never worked on him). If we can be more like him, our business development and trade negotiation will do much better. But with our "she'll be right" approach, we might just be playing on the sidelines.

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