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India can gather support at UNGA: Australia

India Australia

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 8. — The visiting Australian foreign minister, Mr Alexander Downer, today said his country was optimistic that India could well muster the two-thirds majority at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

required for getting into the UN Security Council as a permanent member. He also said that the same went for other aspirants (Japan, Germany and Brazil). "There is good chance" of the G-4 getting the UNGA support in September.

Mr Downer told a press conference after his talks with the external affairs minister, Mr K Natwar Singh. "This is not the time to give up," he said and urged India and the other three members to keep working towards achieving their goal.

He said Mr Natwar Singh raised the issue at the talks with



Mr Alexander Downer

him and that he made it clear that India was one of the countries which Australia would like to see as a permanent member on the UNSC. "It is not proper for India to be excluded from the permanent membership," he said. As India had one billion people and a significant economy, it was natural that it wanted to make a matching impact at the global forum, he said.

Mr Downer said Australia recognised India as a major trade partner and an ally in the battle against global terrorism and hence would like to develop a mutually beneficial strategic relationship. He said India had greater experience of tackling terror. Australia's ties on economic and educational fields with India were also fast growing, he said, noting that Australia had become the second most sought after destination for Indian students after the USA.

Trade, regional security and energy cooperation were among the subjects discussed during the talks. Only last month both countries had agreed to initiate work on a trade and economic framework, aimed at boosting bilateral visits, economic and trade ties, energy and security as well as cooperation on regional and global issues of mutual concern.

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“Australia can partner India’s growth”

Australia is seeking greater cooperation with India’s defence and security agencies. Australian Foreign Minister **Alexander Downer** said, in written answers to questions from **P.S. Suryanarayana**, that Canberra intends to pursue a series of new initiatives to tone up ties with India.

Australia obviously has taken a strategic decision to develop substantive relations with India. What are the new realities that have influenced Canberra’s move to think out of the box?

India is a vibrant democracy, which has made great strides in economic reform, and which is committed to a secure, stable region. All these things are also true of Australia. Australia shares many common interests with India, and we remain committed to developing a dynamic, forward-looking and mutually-beneficial approach to our relationship.

By the standards generally used to measure bilateral relations – high-level political visits, interaction between communities and business, and trade and investment flows – Australia-India relations have never been in better shape.

The bilateral relationship is now underpinned by a quartet of annual ministerial and senior-official level dialogues which provide the institutional structure for managing and expanding the political, economic and strategic facets of the relationship: the Foreign Ministers’ Framework Dialogue; the Joint Ministerial Commission (on trade); the Senior Officials’ Talks; and the Strategic Dialogue which includes Joint Working Groups dealing with defence, counter-terrorism and immigration.

Australia has the resources, the technology and the services to partner India’s continued economic expansion. And judging by our current export growth, India already recognises this complementarity. India has now become Australia’s sixth largest export market – up from ninth last year.

A key outcome of the [meeting of the] Joint Ministerial Commission [in Sydney on May 19 this year] was an agreement to begin negotiations on a Trade and Economic Framework (TEF). The proposed TEF would set the direction for the facilitation and future development of our trade and economic relationship. A key aim will be to boost cooperation and enhance policy dialogue on issues of mutual interest.

Australia welcomes the close and constructive cooperation we have had with India on efforts to develop a tsunami early warning system. The proposed network of national warning centres to be coordinated by UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) is on track to be formally launched later this month and should provide an effective and durable system. Australia particularly appreciates the close working arrangements we are building with India to detect tsunamis originating from the Sunda Trench and [we] believe this shows the benefit of our working cooperatively on issues of mutual interest in the Indian Ocean.

Please specify what you hope to achieve, in regard to political and economic matters, during your prospective visit to India. Does Australia intend to go beyond the existing framework of bilateral strategic dialogue and seek a partnership with India on international issues?

We intend to pursue a series of initiatives across a large number of areas, which I am



Alexander Downer ... keen on enhancing economic cooperation with India. – PHOTO: AFP

only able to touch on in this interview.

These initiatives include a proposed increase in high-level ministerial visits, particularly in the sectors of science and technology, energy, agriculture and defence; the encouragement of greater bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation; and promoting cooperation between the Australian and Indian film industries by facilitating the production of Indian films in Australia. We are also seeking greater interaction and cooperation between our defence and security agencies, and we are pursuing a number of training and education initiatives, including scholarships, and Indian participation in international visitor and training programmes.

Australia’s relationship with India is rich and varied, and this is reflected in the broad agenda of meetings I will be having with Indian interlocutors.

What are the parameters, if any, of the support that Canberra has already extended to India in its current bid for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council? Is Australia pressing for India’s participation in the U.S.-sponsored Proliferation Security Initiative?

Australia is a longstanding supporter of U.N. reform. Australia supports a Security Council that more accurately reflects contemporary geopolitical realities. India is clearly an important player regionally and globally in today’s world.

Consistent with this approach, Australia

supports Security Council reform that includes permanent membership for Japan, India, Brazil plus appropriate African representation.

As permanent chair of one of the key international export control regimes (the Australia Group) and through new practical measures like the Proliferation Security Initiative, Australia is firmly committed to global efforts to counter the WMD [weapons of mass destruction] threat.

As a country with nuclear weapons, India has particular responsibilities for ensuring effective domestic controls on its nuclear and other WMD-relevant dual-use materials, technology and knowledge. Australia recognises the responsibility India is taking with respect to counter-proliferation – for example, with the passage on May 13, 2005 of legislation prohibiting proliferation of WMD and their delivery systems.

What is Canberra’s policy on defence-related engagement with New Delhi? Is a defence cooperation accord on the cards? Will Australia favour anti-terror maritime exercises under the auspices of Association of South East Asian Nations’ Regional Forum (which includes India, China, the United States and Australia, among others)?

We see India as a key partner in promoting regional security. Australia and India also have close bilateral talks that provide valuable opportunities to increase our cooperation on issues including transnational threats, particularly terrorism, as well as de-

fence and border security.

Australia welcomes the increased global and regional focus on maritime security in South and South-East Asia, which is of critical importance, given the dependence of regional economies on sea-borne trade.

The Indian Navy’s cooperation with the U.S. Navy in the conduct of anti-terrorist patrols in the Malacca Straits in 2001 is illustrative of the important role India can play in this regard.

What is the status of Australia’s dialogue with India on the situation in Fiji and the stalled progress towards the formation of a wider India Ocean community?

Fiji is another area of shared interest for Australia and India. Tension between ethnic Fijian and Indo-Fijian political representatives is increasing in the lead-up to the 2006 election. Australia is concerned about these tensions and will ... take appropriate opportunities to raise our concerns with the Government of Fiji.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) has the potential to play a useful role in promoting closer economic engagement between Australia and the countries of the Indian Ocean Rim.

While IOR-ARC has not lived up to expectations so far, a recent decision to allow projects to go ahead with the support of at least six members (as opposed to a consensus of all members) was a positive development.

India, Australia to evolve 'trade framework'

"It will provide a very good fit"

P.S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE: India and Australia have agreed to fashion a bilateral "Trade and Economic Framework" while New Delhi and Singapore have "finalised" their "Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement."

These developments were spelt out by Union Commerce Minister Kamal Nath in a brief telephonic conversation as he transited through Singapore on Saturday while on his way back home from Australia.

The initiative for TEF was decided upon during the Australia-India Joint Commission meeting that took place in Sydney a few days ago.

The move is in line with Australia's highly evolved economic relationship with Japan and marks a positive breakthrough in Canberra's interactions with New Delhi, according to diplomatic sources.

The Joint Commission meeting was presided over by Mr. Kamal Nath and Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile.

Other key participants included India's High Commissioner to Australia P.P. Shukla and his Australian counterpart John McCarthy and India's Joint Secretary (Commerce) S.S. Kapur.

Mr. Kamal Nath said the proposed framework with Australia would not be a free trade agreement as such and would indeed cover bilateral interactions in regard to investment, technology, services and also goods.

As for the rationale of the planned framework, he said Australia's natural resources and India's human resource provided for "a very good fit."

So far, New Delhi's engagement with Canberra "has not been very much" and the idea was to "put India on the radar of Australia," which had tended to look towards north Asia rather than south Asia, Mr. Kamal Nath said.

Besides co-chairing the Australia-India Joint Commission, he participated in a meeting of the Joint Business Council and met the premiers of the Australian states of New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. Discussions were also held with the Australian Minister for Information and communications Technology and the Arts Helen Coonan.

The Australia-India merchandise trade is now of the order of 5.5 billion Australian dollars, and a goal set now is to raise this to the eight billion mark within the next two or three years.

While the Australian investments in India are of the order of \$200 millions, India's investments in Australia are considerably higher, at about \$1 billion, on account of Indian participation in the information technology and mining sectors.

On the India-Singapore front the signing of the CECA was expected to take place in a month, Mr. Kamal Nath indicated.

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