

# Time to wet the shamrock!

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**T**ODAY, SAINT Patrick's Day, is a time of celebration for the Irish and their friends everywhere and also one of reflection, renewal and looking forward. In 15 years, Ireland has transformed itself from being a relatively poor agrarian economy into one of the most prosperous countries in the world, with a cutting-edge knowledge economy and a reputation as a world-class supplier of goods and services and attractive location for inwards investment. Our success is critically dependent on remaining highly competitive, dynamic, innovative and research-oriented, with a top-class education system delivering high-achieving business, scientific, engineering and other graduates.

We also remain jealously attached to preserving the quality of life for which Ireland is renowned, ranking us as one of the best places in the world in which to live. We treasure friendship, conversation, humour and good-natured interest in others. We delight in our music and song, our breathtaking scenery, and our old castles and country houses.

Here in India we remember affectionately the old bonds of friendship and the contribution which Irish people such as Alfred Webb (who chaired the Indian National Congress conference in 1894), Annie Besant, Margaret Noble



**PATRICK, COME FAST!**

(‘Sister Nivedita’) and Margaret Cousins played in the Indian ‘awakening’. There was also the Tagore-Yeats friendship; and the admiration which Pandit Nehru had for the great Irish writers, Shaw in particular. Not too surprising given that Nehru was tutored by F.T. Brooks, who was of Irish origin, and who nurtured in him his love of reading.

The Irish in India are small in number, but we have the great good fortune of being among thousands of Indian friends who, including because they may have attended one of the ‘Irish’ convents here, feel a strong affinity for Ireland. Honouring the towering political figure of 20th century Ireland, Éamon de Valera Marg was inaugurated in Delhi on St Patrick's Day in 2007. A landmark to the old linkages, the road points us forward as we reinvigorate and take the Indo-Irish relationship to new heights.

Éamon Ó Cuív, Ireland's Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, is in India. I know he will enjoy visiting the road, both as a minister and as a grandson of Éamon de Valera. We look forward to ‘wetting the shamrock’ with many of our Indian friends, raising a toast both to the old island of saints and scholars, and the transformed, ultra-modern country that is Ireland today. Sláinte — your very good health!

*Kieran Dowling is Ambassador of Ireland to India*