

**Address by HE Kieran Dowling, Ambassador of Ireland to India, to the North Delhi Rotary - Wednesday 6 August, 2008**

## **IMPARTING NEW LIFE TO THE OLD INDO-IRISH FRIENDSHIP**

President Navin Chandra, officers and members of the North Delhi Rotary, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. As an admirer of the excellent work you Rotarians do and your big contribution to society, it is real pleasure to be with you this evening.

As I enter the last days of what has been a wonderful 4-year posting as Ambassador of Ireland to this great country, I am honoured to accept your kind invitation to reflect on the good bonds of friendship which have closely linked our two countries for so long and also to set out some things being done to give new life to the bilateral Indo-Irish relationship, in this the new modern era. If I may, I will begin by outlining some of the old links, going on then to speak about areas serving as a kind of bridge between past and present before looking, in conclusion, at current developments and aspirations for the future.

### **The old links binding Ireland and India**

I greatly treasure the affinities and the warm and genuine ties of friendship, affection and understanding which have long united our two peoples. The relationship goes back much further, but for me personally 1894 is something of a landmark, given it was in that year the Irish Parliamentary Party sent the Irish parliamentarian Alfred Webb to chair the annual session of the Indian Congress Party.

The list of Irish people who played an honourable part in the Indian 'awakening' is a long and distinguished one. It includes Annie Besant, who like Webb before her presided over a session of the Indian National Congress and who indeed was its first woman President. Besant played a big part in the Home Rule Movement in India and she was of course interned here. With her eloquence and powerful advocacy, she was a strong influence in adding to the confidence of Indians in their spiritual and national heritage. Margaret Cousins, who moved to India in 1915 with her husband Robert, also worked for Home Rule in India and was founder of the All-India Women's Conference - she too did a stint in prison here. Cousins is also credited with having assisted Rabindranath Tagore in setting down the notation of the English language translation of Jana Gana Mana.

The links with Bengal were particularly strong where, the historians tell us, books such as Dan Breen's 'My fight for Irish Freedom' became something of a bible for the young activists there. Most eloquently, Subhas Chandra Bose, writing to a contact in Ireland, said that "in my part of India – Bengal – there is hardly an educated family where books about the Irish heroes are not read, and, if I may say so, devoured". Remembering Terence MacSwiney's death by fasting in Ireland in 1920, we know too that when Jatin Das, the Congress member from Bengal, died in prison in Lahore in 1929, his family took comfort from the letter of condolence they received from the MacSwiney family.

Visiting West Bengal today, it is touching to discover that Margaret Noble, or ‘Sister Nivedita’ as she was known in India, is still warmly remembered.

The famines which struck both our countries over the years were also a bonding factor as we shared in each other’s terrible grief and suffering. Commenting on the famine relief assistance which De Valera provided in response to a telegram he received from the Mayor of Calcutta in relation to the 1943 famine, Nehru wrote movingly of countries like Ireland which, although “poor in their own resources, full of their own difficulties, yet having had bitter experiences themselves of famine and misery and sensing what ailed the body and spirit of India, gave generous help”.

Staying with Pandit Nehru – of whose eloquent prose and historical commentary I am a keen and admiring student – Irish people liked his depiction of Ireland as a little country which, throughout many long centuries of occupation, had refused to submit to an alien domination and which, generation after generation, had risen in revolt to proclaim it would not submit. Describing the long Irish *diaspora*, he movingly recalled the vast number of Irish who “left the home they loved so passionately and emigrated to ...many distant countries...and whenever they went they carried a bit of Ireland in their hearts”.

As older Indians in particular are aware, the bonds between our two nations became especially strong in the first half of the last Century as Ireland and then India moved to independence. The Mahatma, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and other Indian leaders drew inspiration from the Irish experience. We deeply appreciated the sympathy, solidarity and understanding which India extended to us during our fight for freedom. Sharing your joy and triumph, Éamon de Valera and the other Irish leaders happily reciprocated as India in turn fulfilled its ‘tryst with destiny’.

### **Bridges linking the old and the new**

The hundred or more ‘Irish’ schools which were founded by Irish Nuns and Brothers and which for decades now have operated throughout the length and breadth of India, were central to the deepening of the links between our two nations and cultures. The work of those Irish educators – of whom we feel so proud - has provided Ireland with a rich and valued heritage in India. Countless thousands of Indians who attended schools run by those dedicated and selfless women and men feel special affection and understanding for Ireland. My work here directed at moving ahead the Indo-Irish agenda has been particularly facilitated by many Ministers, senior officials and indeed leaders in all walks of life in India who, from their time in an ‘Irish’ school, have been left with a special feeling of empathy and goodwill for Ireland.

While few in number and now no longer young, many of the Irish educators who remain are still working away and making their contribution to education and the social services here. Those who could came together in Delhi in January 2006 to meet with the then Irish Prime Minister, the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, where, at a function in their honour held in St. Columba’s College, he lauded their magnificent contribution here down through the years.

Sister M. Cyril Mooney, a formidable Kolkata-based Loreto nun, was awarded the Padma Shri in 2007 for her contribution to education and the social services in India. I paid a farewell call on her last week and saw the wonderful work she is doing, both in her Loreto Sealdah school there and in her outreach activities. In addition to the regular pupils, it is admirable that many children from the streets - or 'rainbows' as they are known, given they are valued as rainbows that give joy whenever they appear – are being sheltered and educated in her school. Talking with them, I told them how deeply Sister Cyril has impressed us all with her tremendous motivational and inspirational qualities, and her sheer drive and energy in getting things done.

I have heard that Sister Cyril once accepted an invitation by former President Bill Clinton to attend a meeting of his Foundation. At the end of the session, Clinton asked some of the deep-pocketed corporate people present to 'make a commitment'. Encouraged to join them on stage, Sister Cyril pointed out that she herself of course was in no position to make any 'commitment'. 'And what', asked Bill charmingly in response, 'do you call 50 years in India'.

I see Sister Cyril's most deserving award of the Padma Shri as recognition of the enormous contribution which the Irish educators more generally have made to India over the years.

Through the work of such educators, India will be familiar with the high priority we attach to education in Ireland. As we work at attracting more Indian students to look at undertaking higher education studies in Ireland, I like to bring to attention that the feedback from Indians who have studied in Ireland is invariably that they found their time with us academically rewarding and a very congenial living experience.

That has been the case right back to the young V.V. Giri's period in Ireland from 1913 to 1916, where he did a degree and also qualified as a barrister. In his writings he tells us that he and his fellow Indian students "felt a great affinity for the Irish". It had been "the expectation of congenial company in a distant land" which had helped him in deciding to study at University in Ireland.

In Ireland we admired the great contribution which Giri went on to make in India, including as a leader of the Labour and Trade Union movement and ultimately, like de Valera, as President of his country.

Another link between the old and the present is to be found in the Éamon de Valera Marg, the road in Delhi inaugurated in 2007 in honour of the towering political figure of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland and good friend of India. A landmark to all the old ties, the Road might tempt us to dust off and re-read De Valera's famous speech to the 'Friends of Freedom for India' in New York in 1920 where, pointing to the 'common cause' of India and Ireland, he swore friendship between the two nations. It might also remind us that De Valera felt "deeply honoured" when, in 1947, Nehru expressed admiration for the 1937 Constitution, one of De Valera's finest achievements, and said he intended to study it as a model for the Constitution of India then being drafted.

For the Irish and their friends in Delhi, it was a touching moment on St. Patrick's Day this year as Éamon Ó Cuív, a Minister in the Irish Government, visited the road in Delhi commemorating his late grandfather, Éamon de Valera.

The close literary links have also been a strong bonding factor between our two countries. I value the tremendous intellectual affinity and connection which so many Indians feel towards Ireland's rich literary heritage – and the very evident sense of identity you feel with many of the world-renowned Irish writers. The celebrated Yeats-Tagore friendship is well known but on a personal level I was happy to discover the extent to which Pandit Nehru, himself a wonderful and prolific writer, admired the great Irish writers, and Shaw in particular.

Writing from Ahmadnagar Fort Prison to his daughter Indira – or 'Darling Indu' as he addressed her - on 9 April 1943, Nehru told her what "a wise man Shaw" was, "full of the deepest understanding of life...Few writers provoke me to thought as much as he does".

Permit me to encourage you to read the wonderful 1948 exchange of letters between Nehru and Shaw, as carried in the book 'A Bunch of Old Letters'. Nehru told Shaw that, like many of his generation, he had grown up in company with his writings and books and that he supposed that a part of him, such as he was then, had been moulded by that reading. Shaw told Nehru that he could consider India "objectively because I am not English but Irish, and have lived through the long struggle for liberation from English rule...". He told Nehru he was "as much a foreigner in England as you were in Cambridge".

It is legitimate to wonder if Nehru's love of Irish literature may perhaps be traced back to Ferdinand T. Brooks, the resident tutor who, on Annie Besant's recommendation, took charge of him when he was about eleven and who was partly Irish, on his father's side. We know from Nehru himself that it was Brooks who developed in him a great taste for reading and indeed who also initiated him into the mysteries of science and who introduced him to Theosophy.

It is pleasant now and then to bear direct witness to the esteem in which Irish writing is held in India. One such moment came when Dr Karan Singh kindly acted as moderator in introducing our then Prime Minister, the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, when he delivered an address in Delhi during his 2006 visit. We all felt deeply moved when Dr. Singh recited from memory the lovely WB Yeats poem, 'The song of Wandering Aengus'.

Our work directed at raising Ireland's profile in India naturally includes the cultural area. Last November, New Delhi's theatre lovers were treated to a dramatic and entertaining performance of *Gulliver's Dublin*, in which veteran Irish actor Eamon Morrissey explored his 50 year fascination with *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift and his own native city of Dublin – a city which provided such inspiration not just to Swift but also to Wilde, Shaw, Joyce, Beckett and so many other great Irish writers. In January, readings and interactive sessions conducted in Delhi by some of Ireland's leading contemporary writers struck a good resonance with audiences here. As part of the first ever Irish Literary Festival in India, guests were treated over 23 days to a mesmerising series of lectures, readings, recitals and exhibitions by the cream of contemporary Irish writers, including Gerard Donovan, Derek Mahon and Dermot Bolger.

## **The present – and the road ahead**

I like to think that, in addition to being a landmark to all the old linkages, the Éamon de Valera Marg points both countries forward encouragingly in bringing additional vibrancy to the bilateral economic relationship. The visit here in 2006 by our then Prime Minister, the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, imparted great impetus to the two-way economic and business relationship. The large accompanying business delegation was afforded an opportunity to showcase what Ireland has to offer as a competitive world-class provider of goods, services and processes, as a top class location for inward investment, as a breathtakingly beautiful and culturally vibrant holiday destination and as an academically-rewarding and hospitable and congenial place for foreign students in which to study. Just as importantly, our business people were able to see up close the enormous trade and joint venture opportunities in the vast and burgeoning Indian market, including in infrastructure.

Our stepped-up economic relationship is already bearing fruit, both in terms of increased trade and additional investment and acquisitions. On the investment front, recent big ticket items have included Wockhardt's sizeable investment in Ireland and a major joint venture investment in India by the large Irish company, CRH. Other companies with a presence in Ireland include Reliance, Wipro and Asian Technologies. We want to see many more Indian companies looking at the value proposition which Ireland can offer.

On the trade and business front, most of Ireland's new export prospects to India are generally high up the knowledge industry spectrum. I am encouraged that many of our indigenous Irish software companies are increasingly taking advantage of niche opportunities in selling software solutions to India's IT and IT enabled service providers and to the mobile telecoms operators. We are also doing well in other sectors, ranging from food distribution to Irish thoroughbred horses. By contrast, we have yet to reach our full potential here in other sectors, such as financial services, where Ireland has a global reach.

We see considerable potential for more linkages, and mutually beneficial collaborations, including through combining our strengths in the IT and biopharma sectors, where we are both world leaders. Good opportunities are there to be exploited in such sectors as aviation, space technology, education, engineering services, oil and gas exploration, infrastructure, telecommunications, the life sciences and food processing. I am impatient to see more 'conversations' developing and more visits in both directions by CEOs and industry leaders, and by scientists, researchers, faculty heads, senior academics and others from both sides to check out what each country has to offer.

As regards our attractions as an investment location, let me tell you that Ireland is the most FDI intensive economy in Europe with a legacy of investment dating back 40 years. We are now the international and European location of choice for approximately 1,000 top tier corporations across sectors as diverse as engineering, information communications technologies, pharmaceuticals, medical technologies, financial and international services. Those companies were attracted by such factors as our strong stable government and regulatory conditions, our established business ecosystem and pro-enterprise culture, our highly skilled, flexible and creative

workforce, our corporate tax rate of just 12.5 per cent and the access we offer to the European Union's 500 million consumers.

It is of particular relevance to India that Ireland is one of only two member states of the European Union where English is the first spoken language. And we are the only English speaking country in the Eurozone – the group of EU member states trading in the Single Currency.

In support of the business efforts, the official Irish presence in India has been greatly strengthened in the last few years. In addition to the Embassy and our Honorary Consulates in Mumbai and Bangalore, Enterprise Ireland, our Trade and Technology Board, now has a full-service Delhi-based operation and the IDA-Ireland, the foremost international FDI agency, recently established an office in Mumbai. Tourism Ireland, which already had a presence in Mumbai, has now also appointed a Delhi-based representative.

The full-service Visa Section we have established within the Embassy means we can now provide a better, faster, business-friendly and more client-focussed visa service to the rising number of business people, tourists and students visiting Ireland. I can report that our new online application process has greatly simplified and speeded up our procedures. The Indo-Irish Friendship Council, under the Chairmanship of Gurpreet Singh Bindra, is also doing good work in advancing the bilateral economic and cultural relationship.

At the launch in Dublin on 1 May of the new Ireland India Business Association, I said that Governments and Ministers can show the way in setting the framework and in offering leadership and Ambassadors and the Embassies on both sides can act as economic matchmakers in effecting liaisons. I added that ultimately, however, it is Business itself which must deliver in doing the business. I wish our enterprises – and of course the creative and cultural people too - every success in taking forward that joint endeavour.

That must of course include working at increasing tourism numbers, in both directions. During my time in India I have enjoyed many of the wondrous and incredible treasures on offer here. In many cases it is the perception of India as an 'exotic' destination that is attracting more and more tourists to visit and check out your many splendid attractions. But if India is an exotic destination for visitors here, so too do Indians holidaying in Ireland marvel at the exotic delights we have to offer.

As you may have noticed, Tourism Ireland, the Irish Tourism authority, is doing a fair bit of advertising in India at present, highlighting our various delights including our fabled heritage and ancient castles, our breathtaking countryside, our traditional music and song, our magnificent golf courses, our wonderful food and drink, and the legendary hospitality and warmth of the Irish. Turning yet again to Mr Nehru's excellent writings, I always feel decidedly nostalgic on reading his 1933 description of Ireland as "a green and beautiful island" dipping "into the Atlantic Ocean on the far west of Europe. It is a small island ...but, little as it is, it is full of romance, and for centuries past it has shown invincible courage and spirit of sacrifice in the struggle for national freedom".

In many ways, Ireland is now utterly changed as compared to the poor, largely agrarian based economy it was just a few decades back. The transformed Ireland of today with its sustained high growth rates is now very much a cutting-edge 'knowledge' economy, highly open and globalised and a world leader in sectors such as information technology and biotechnology.

In other ways, however, I would like to think we are still fully the romantic and friendly place described by Pandit Nehru all those years ago. Ireland may indeed have grown prosperous, with the second highest GDP per capita within the 27-country European Union. But success has most certainly not spoilt us. Just as in India, the old community and family based values – the old decencies, if you like – still run strong. Just like you, we relish friendship, good company and good conversation – especially where this is leavened with good-natured humour, and maybe even a little song.

I like to think that in Ireland, just as in India, side by side with our very advanced economic status, the old hidden Ireland with all its pleasurable and memorable offerings is very much there for discerning visitors to discover. A few years back, during the large St. Patrick's Day reception we hosted in Mumbai, a charming young TV interviewer asked me if we still had leprechauns in Ireland. My first reflex reaction was to say that there was no place for leprechauns in the advanced and sophisticated economy that is Ireland today. I then immediately felt guilty – after all, who was I to kill off our wonderful old leprechaun population! So retracting, I said that leprechauns, together hopefully with their legendary crock of gold assets, were indeed still to be found in Ireland.

If you decide to visit us to experience our charms, you will discover why Ireland in 2008 was voted one of the world's friendliest destinations by the Lonely Planet Blue List.

In the interests of achieving widespread exposure here for all we have to offer, I would dearly love to see a Bollywood blockbuster made in Ireland against the background of the beautiful Irish scenery. Given he is a past pupil of St. Columba's and someone who as such we would like to see as 'one of our own, it would be tremendous if Shah Rukh Khan were to play the lead.

In conclusion, let me say that, while continuing to savour and value all the treasured old links, the big current focus is on bringing the trade and business relationship to new heights and in raising awareness of each country in the other country. The need too, as Ambassador PS Raghavan, my counterpart in Ireland, said recently is to exploit the complementarities in our expanding economies to take our bilateral cooperation to a qualitatively higher level. IT is an obvious example, where Ireland's strengths are in IT products and India's strengths are in IT Service. The differences between us, and not least in size, should not distract us from the considerable value and potential we have for each other as partners.

Whether as business people or tourists or indeed both, do come and visit Ireland to see what we have to offer. I believe you will not be disappointed.

Thank you.