



Harper attends Diwali celebrations in Ottawa

AJIT JAIN

Prime Minister Stephen Harper was the chief guest at the Diwali celebrations October 8 at the Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

Conservative Member of Parliament Deepak Obhrai has been organizing the Diwali celebrations at the parliamentary building for nine years now. Over 400 people from across Canada, including dozens of federal ministers and lawmakers, were also present.

"Tonight we celebrate one of India's greatest gifts to the world, a celebration that embodies some of humanity's highest ideals," Harper said, adding that Diwali "illuminates the universal hope of all peoples for the renewal of life and the triumph of good over evil."

At the heart of the Diwali celebrations, he noted, "lies the *diya* [lamp]. The lamp is a metaphor for knowledge, the light that overpowers the darkness of ignorance that exposes injustice and oppression and that guides and inspires our collective and individual quests for enlightenment."

He lauded Indo-Canadians' contributions to Canada by being "at the forefront of our ongoing national quest to build an ever better country for the generations to come. From coast to coast, our country has been and continues to be immeasurably enriched by your contributions."

Indo-Canadians aren't just succeeding, he added, "you are



Conservative lawmaker Deepak Obhrai, left, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Pandit Roop Nath Sharma of Toronto's Ram Mandir light the ceremonial lamp
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raising the standard of excellence. Your ambition, work ethic and entrepreneurialism are propelling yourselves, your community and your country, Canada, to ever great achievements."

He noted that "Canada's relationship with India is growing ever stronger."

Chamber, and the sponsors of the event.

Guests included Indian High Commissioner S M Gavai, dozens of heads of other diplomatic missions; Minister for Citizenship and Immigration Jason Kenney, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan.

He said during the last four years since the Conservatives came to power, they have been working hard "to build stronger, better relations with the rising giant of South Asia. While we've accomplished much, there's still much to do, and as we move forward, the knowledge, expertise and connections of the Indo-Canadian community will be of invaluable help to our government."

Pandit Roop Nath Sharma, president, Hindu Federation of Temples of the Greater Toronto Area, conducted the traditional rituals and explained their significance.

Obhrai explained how he started the Diwali celebration on Parliament Hill in 1998 with the support of the Indo-Canadian community.

"Since then," he added, "the Diwali on Parliament Hill has grown in significance and stature, and today can truly be considered as Canada's national Diwali festival."

He thanked this year's organizers of the event, the India Canada Association of the National Capital Region and the India-Canada Ottawa Business

In Diwali, Ontario celebrates multiculturalism

AJIT JAIN

Member of Ontario Legislature Khalil Ramal was one of the keynote speakers at the Diwali dinner organized by the Dr Helena Jaczek, another Liberal Member of Ontario Legislature.

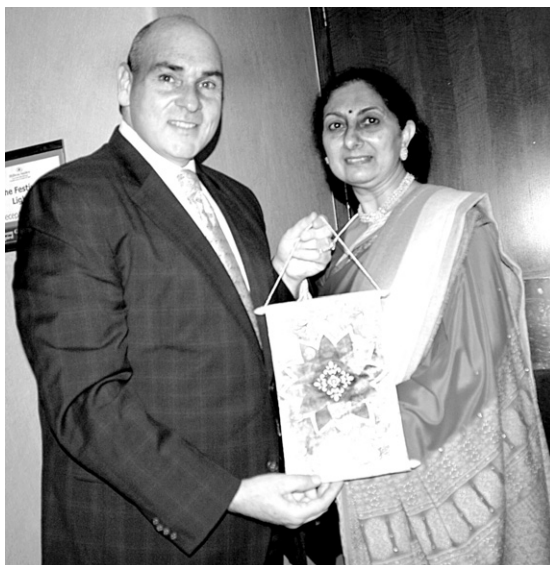
By organizing the Diwali dinner, said Ramal, who is also the Liberal Party caucus's multicultural chair, "Jaczek is sending a message to all of us about multiculturalism."

"I think it [Ramal, a Muslim, addressing a Diwali event] is something we should be proud of and celebrate," said Ontario Deputy Premier George Smitherman, who was another keynote speaker at the event October 6.

"The increased knowledge shows us that for those of us who might like to celebrate Christmas, throughout the calendar there's an opportunity to celebrate religious and cultural events in the beautiful diversity that's Toronto and Ontario," he added.

He cited the example of Eid: "In the last few years people have learnt much more about

the Muslims, Ramadan and sacrifice and also the values that recognize that we all have responsibilities to our broader communities. [Similarly,] Diwali is something that we can all embrace as it signifies the role of light and sense of hopefulness and pious beginning. I think this is just a natural positive evolution. This diversity is our strength."



Ontario Deputy Premier George Smitherman, left, with artist Asha Aditi Ruparelia

Dr Asha Seth and Dr Amin Babul were co-chairs of the event.

"I am proud of Ontario's multiculturalism and diversity," noted Seth.

"We are making something new here," said Jaczek. "It will be a different Ontario as we continue to work hard to strengthen diversity in our province and each one of us contributes to Ontario's strength."

In his keynote, Smitherman said, "We have here the opportunity that can harness all the strength that comes with diversity, rather than to succumb to the temptations to be weakened by those challenges which come from diversity."

Liberals slam Day's India visit as mere photo op

AJIT JAIN

Scott Brison, the Liberal trade critic, has slammed International Trade Minister Stockwell Day's recent India visit as a mere 'photo op'.

Day traveled to Ahmedabad for a day two weeks ago to formally open Canada's eighth trade office in India.

The visit alone, Brison said in a statement from Ottawa, won't increase trade between Canada and India. He said the "photo op at the trade office in Ahmedabad was simply an attempt to distract Canadians from the Conservative government's dismal record regarding India's import market."

He claimed Canada's "share of India's imports has dropped by more than 30 percent since the Conservatives took office. While in 2005 Canada had 0.9 percent of India's import market, that share has fallen every year the Conservatives have been in power. Canada's share of India's import market dropped to 0.91 percent in 2006, then fell to 0.80 percent in 2007, and then fell again to 0.68 percent in 2008. Reversing this trend is going to take more than the minister cutting a ribbon during a brief stopover in India."

Bilateral Canada-India trade was less than \$3 billion three years ago; it was worth \$4.6 billion in 2008, a 22.5 percent annual increase. Merchandise exports to India in 2008, Day told *India Abroad*, totaled \$2.4 billion, an increase of 35 percent from the previous year. According to government projections, the bilateral trade figure is likely to reach \$10 billion over the next five years, Day said.

Brison noted that "Canada's greatest assets are the Canadian citizens [Indo-Canadians] who understand the languages and culture of India. But immigration from India dropped 21 percent between 2005 and 2007."