



PARLIAMENT
OF AUSTRALIA

Visit by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

India and Singapore
10–16 December 2023

REPORT | FEBRUARY 2024



© Commonwealth of Australia 2024

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License

[https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

ISBN 978-1-76092-622-9

Contents

- Members of the Delegation4**
 - Leader of the Delegation 4
 - Delegates 4
 - Officials 4
- Introduction 5**
- Acknowledgements 6**
- Report of Activities 8**
 - Sunday 10 December 2023 8
 - Monday 11 December 2023 8
 - Tuesday 12 December 2023 11
 - Wednesday 13 December 2023 14
 - Thursday 14 December 17
 - Friday 15 December 2023 19
 - Saturday 16 December 2023 21
- Delegation Program 23**
 - Sunday 10 December 23
 - Monday 11 December 23
 - Tuesday 12 December 23
 - Wednesday 13 December 24
 - Thursday 14 December 24
 - Friday 15 December 25
 - Saturday 16 December 25

Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

- Mr Josh Wilson MP
Member for Fremantle

Delegates

- Mr Matt Burnell MP
Member for Spence
- Senator the Hon Matthew Canavan
Senator for Queensland

Officials

- Ms Pauline Cullen
Delegation Secretary

Introduction

This report gives an account of the visit by members of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties to India and Singapore from 10 December to 16 December 2023.

The delegation had a focus on Australia's increasing engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and with these two countries specifically. The delegation allowed the Committee to develop a more nuanced understanding of the key interests and areas of engagement between Australia and each country. There was a particular focus on examining the flow-on effects of several agreements which have already entered into force such as the recent Australia-India Economic Cooperation, the Australia-India Audio-Visual Co-Production Agreement, and the Singapore Digital Trade Agreement.

Delegation members were grateful for the opportunity to benefit from a packed and diverse program in the course of the visit, and appreciated the chance to discuss in more depth, the impact of the various relevant treaties and agreements that the Treaties Committee has considered over time.

There was clear value in the presence of the delegation as a way of drawing attention to recent agreements. During some of the delegation's work it was clear there was a relatively superficial understanding in some relevant sectors of how such agreements provided new avenues for both commercial and cultural engagement – especially, and not surprisingly, where small and medium enterprises were concerned. On that basis the delegation members agreed there could be merit in providing additional means and resources to the promotion and understanding, in-country, of key trade and other agreements once they come into force. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties will consider this topic when considering future agreements.

Mr Josh Wilson MP
Member for Fremantle

Acknowledgements

The delegation would like to acknowledge the valuable support provided to support the visit program at the end of what was a very busy year for visits in India and Singapore.

Prior to departure, the delegation received helpful and informative briefings from the International and Parliamentary Relations Office, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, and the Department of Parliamentary Services.

During the visit to India, the delegation was accompanied by officers from the High Commission in India, led by His Excellency Mr Phillip Green OAM, High Commissioner to India, and the Australian Consulate-General in Kolkata led by Consul-General Ms Rowan Ainsworth.

While in Singapore, the delegation was accompanied by officers from the High Commission in Singapore, led by His Excellency, Mr Allaster Cox, High Commissioner to Singapore.

The High Commissioner of both India and Singapore, Consul-General in Kolkata, and their staff provided comprehensive briefings and logistical assistance throughout the visit. The delegation appreciates the efforts made to accommodate its needs and ensure a successful visit.

The delegation particularly wishes to thank:

- Mr Tom Overton-Clarke, Second Secretary and Mr John Southwell Trade and Investment Commissioner and other DFAT staff for assistance in India.
- Mr Alastair Davis, Second Secretary and Ms Jodie Sandery Visits and Functions Officer, and other DFAT staff for assistance in Singapore.
- Mr Ivan Caran from the Australian Federal Police who accompanied the delegation in India.
- Ms Renae Onitiri, Assistant Director, International and Parliamentary Relations Office, who provided an important liaison role in the program's development and arranged travel and accommodation and the pre-departure briefing for the delegation.
- Ms Pauline Cullen, Secretary, Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Finally, the delegation would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that graciously gave their time to meet with the delegation and expresses its appreciation for the open spirit and hospitality with which we were received.

Report of Activities

Sunday 10 December 2023

The delegation travelled from home ports in Perth, Adelaide, and Brisbane to Kolkata, via Singapore, and received a briefing upon arrival from the Consul-General, Ms Rowan Ainsworth, who provided an overview of the relationship between Australia and India, with a focus on the West Bengal region.

The delegation transferred to the Oberoi Grand Hotel.

Monday 11 December 2023

Meeting with Century Ply – Century House

The delegation met with Mr Keshav Bhajanka and Mr Ajay Baldawa, Executive Directors of Century Ply, a company which produces high grade plywood, mainly from imported timber and logs. The delegation was interested in meeting with importers and exporters such as Century Ply about the benefits accruing through the Australian-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (AI-ECTA) and the benefits which could be gained from future agreements. The delegation had a wide-ranging discussion considering tariffs, cost of shipping, imported products versus domestic agroforestry, and the prospects for exporting products.

Meeting with importers of Australian pulses – Australian Consulate-General

The delegation met with importers of Australian pulses. Australia is a major global exporter of pulses, being the largest exporter of chickpeas and broad beans, the second largest importer of lentils after Canada and the fourth and fifth largest exporter of mung beans and peas respectively.¹

The discussion was influenced by the Indian Government's announcement lifting import restrictions on yellow peas until 31 March 2024 and the impact that this would have on supply and demand. There was also discussion on the impact of tariffs and the potential impact of AI-ECTA.

Visit to Nature's Basket retail store

The delegation visited the Nature's Basket retail store in Kolkata with an opportunity to see some of the range of Australian products and Australian wines

¹ [Insight – Australia is a key global exporter of pulses - DAFF \(agriculture.gov.au\)](#)

which were available to Indian consumers. Nature's Basket Kolkata is a higher end neighbourhood convenience store with fresh foods, meats, cheeses, bakery products and wine and spirits as well as a wide range of imported gourmet products. Australian products stocked included Capilano honey, Mission tortillas and wraps and unvined (alcohol-removed) Jacobs Creek wine.

After AI-EFTA entered into force in December 2022, the value of exports to India increased 106 per cent. The leading exports were lentils which increased by 220 per cent and cotton which increased by 199 per cent.²



Delegates with Consul-General, Ms Rowan Ainsworth at the Nature's Basket store

Working lunch with representatives of the film industry in Kolkata – Bengal Club

The delegation had a working lunch with representatives of the film industry in Kolkata.

They discussed the recent Australia-India Audio-Visual Co-Production Agreement and the opportunities that this presented for the film industry in India, noting without surprise that there was still relatively low awareness of the among the film

² [Overview – Agriculture, fisheries, and forestry exports in 2022–23 - DAFF](#)

industry representatives, considering the agreement was settled in September last year. It was nevertheless welcome that the delegation could explain the new avenues for screen cooperation presented by this agreement.

The delegation was interested to hear that there are many streaming or over-the-top platforms (OTT) in India and many producers choose to release their films directly on these OTT platforms, not least because of the demand for language specific media. It is notable that Bengali is the world's seventh-largest language group.

Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The delegation met with the oldest chamber of commerce in the country, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Chair explained the role of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties in considering the recent Australia-India bilateral trade agreement in 2022, and spoke about the work of the committee more generally.

The delegation discussed the aforementioned AI-ECTA free trade agreement, which came into force at the beginning of 2023 noting that AI-ECTA eliminated a range of tariffs but not all, and that some more tariff cuts will come into play on 1 January of each year. It was noted that AI-ECTA benefits have been 'front loaded' so that businesses see the benefits straight away.

The delegation had a wide-ranging discussion with the group, considering concentration of exports, manufacturing of both lead-acid and lithium batteries, coal imports and the type of coal imported.

The delegation discussed the level of awareness of AI-ECTA as it was noted that larger companies may be ready to take advantage of AI-ECTA but small to medium enterprises may not be aware the agreement is in force.

Meeting with local importers and exporters - Backyard Café

The delegation attended an evening drinks event featuring importers and exporters at the Backyard Café in Kolkata.

The delegation met with some innovative small enterprises, including some that are working in the area of waste reduction, recycling, and the circular economy.

The Backyard Café is a new style of café for Kolkata that features indoor and outdoor play areas for children and café food.

Cerebral – In Conversation with Kishwar Chowdhury, Bachi Karkaria and Kounteya Sinha – Terrace Garden, Taj Bengal

The delegation attended an evening function featuring Australian Masterchef Season 13 finalist, Kishwar Chowdhury, who has West Bengal heritage, in conversation with journalists Bachi Karkaria and Kounteya Sinha.

The delegation enjoyed hearing the conversation which covered Kishwar’s professional journey, her views on the evolving concept of the food and hospitality industry, as well as her perspective as an Australian of Indian heritage.



Cerebral – Taj Bengal Hotel, Kolkata

Tuesday 12 December 2023

Breakfast meeting with Mr Aritra Sen, Director Roadshow films

The delegation had a breakfast meeting with Mr Aritra Sen, a producer, writer and director, Roadshow Films.

Visit to Mother House – home of Mother Teresa

The delegation visited Mother House in A.J.C. Bose Road, paying respect to the Tomb of Mother Teresa, observing Mother Teresa’s room and the on-site Museum.



Delegation members paying respect at Mother Teresa's tomb

Ride on the Tram of Horror – Kolkata International Film Festival

The 29th Kolkata International Film Festival was held from Tuesday 5 December until Tuesday 12 December while the delegation was visiting. The delegation rode the “Tram of Horror” through the centre of Kolkata. The specially decorated tram with skeletons, Halloween masks, and various convincing horror elements was a part of the celebration of Australia being the focus country at the Film Festival, referencing the Australian film industry’s longstanding interest in the gothic and horror genres, from Picnic at Hanging Rock to Wolf Creek.

Visit to the Victoria Memorial

The Victoria Memorial was developed by Lord Curzon as a memorial to Queen Victoria and opened in 1921. The building is made of marble quarried from the same area as that of the Taj Mahal and features art and artefacts celebrating Queen Victoria’s life and the key historical events of the local region.

Visit to the New Market

The delegation visited the New Market, one of Kolkata’s oldest markets featuring more than 2000 stalls and shops, with a special interest in Australian products

where imports have increased as a result of the AI-ECTA, including sheep meat Australian almonds, oranges, mandarins and broad beans.³



Delegates with Consul-General, Ms Rowan Ainsworth and staff at New Market, Kolkata

Flight from Kolkata to Delhi

The delegation travelled from Kolkata to New Delhi. Upon arrival, the delegation transferred to the Leela Palace Hotel.

150 anniversary of Rio Tinto with launch of stamp - Australian High Commissioner's Residence

The delegation attended an evening function at the Australian High Commissioner's Residence, attended by a range of Australian business people, where a stamp was launched celebrating 150 years of operation for Rio Tinto.

³ [Overview – Agriculture, fisheries, and forestry exports in 2022–23 - DAFF](#)

Wednesday 13 December 2023

Breakfast meeting with Mr Mahesh Jethmalani, Taj Mahal Hotel

The delegation members had a breakfast meeting with Mr Mahesh Jethmalani, a nominated Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament. The President of India can nominate twelve members to the Rajya Sabha, for their contributions towards arts, literature, sciences and social sciences, for a six-year term.

Mr Jethmalani is a Senior Advocate at Bombay High Court and has appeared in several important cases before the Bombay High Court and Supreme Court of India.



Delegation members and DFAT staff meeting with Mr Mahesh Jethmalani

Meeting with Association of Australian Education Agents in India (AAERI) Executive, Australian High Commission

The delegation discussed current issues in education in Australia, with some comparisons of what is available in the UK and the USA for students coming from India. It was noted that two Australian universities have been approved to have a presence in Gift City Special Economic Zone (Gujurat International Finance Tec-City) Deakin University and University of Wollongong will both have a presence in Gift City. During the discussion the value of Australian work experience for Indian students was emphasised, particularly post study work. Representatives note that Indian students are interested in rankings of Australian universities.



Wine Roundtable with Indian Wine Importers

The delegation took part in a roundtable on wine with a large group of Indian wine importers. The developing wine culture in India includes Jacob's Creek as one of the most popular and recognised labels. The enormous potential for increased Australian wine exports to India was a central theme of the Committee's consideration of the AI-ECTA.

Key topics covered in the roundtable discussion included:

- challenges around wine in India
- how to grow wine culture
- inculcating social responsibility in wine drinkers
- Wine importers noted that they needed support in ensuring that wine regarded as being product of choice not something that should be linked in with hard spirits
- The impact of AI-ECTA and the reduction in tariffs over time on bottled wine.

Lunch hosted by His Excellency Phillip Green OAM, High Commissioner's Residence

The delegation enjoyed a discussion of regional geopolitics and trade, with an Australia-India focus, with His Excellency, Mr Philip Green, and relevant High Commission staff at his residence.

High Commissioner's Keynote Address at Asia Society Policy Institute - Taj Mahal Hotel

The delegation attended the High Commissioner's keynote address to the Asia Society Policy Institute, *Trajectories and end points: Australia-India relations in 2023*. This was regarded by some as the first official public speech by the High Commissioner, and his Excellency delivered a wide-ranging address which covered a range of points including:

- where the India-Australia relationship has come from
- the bilateral trajectory
- the affinity between Australia and India -the human bridge and
- the three priorities:
 - Maritime Domain Awareness,
 - Two-way trade and investment, and
 - Green energy transformation.

Australia-India Energy Transition Roundtable

The delegation took part in a roundtable on Australia-India Energy Transition facilitated by Mr Sanjiva de Silva, Counsellor at the Australian High Commission.

Key topics covered in the roundtable discussion included:

- the target for EV new sales in India is 30% by 2030.
- India is expected to become the largest coal importer in the world.
- Australia and India are very complementary and have some definite synergies.
- Electric buses in ACT and Victoria
- Australian rare minerals
- Discussion about AI-ECTA and how much of this work will be done by trade facilitation
- High utilisation rate of AI-ECTA.

Function with Indian Parliamentarians hosted by the High Commissioner at his residence.

The delegation attended a function with members of the Indian Parliament hosted by the High Commissioner at his residence.

Flight from New Delhi to Singapore

The delegation travelled overnight from New Delhi to Singapore. Upon arrival, the delegation transferred to the Fairmont Hotel, Singapore.

Thursday 14 December

Visit to Kranji War and Military Cemetery – tour and wreath laying

The delegation took part in a guided tour of the Kranji War and Military Cemetery and laid a wreath.



Delegation members lay a wreath at the Kranji War and Military Cemetery

Briefing from the High Commissioner, Singapore and High Commission staff

The High Commissioner provided a background on current developments in Singapore and on the relationship with Australia. Following the 13th meeting of the Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee on 1 May 2023, work has begun

on developing the agenda for the next chapter of the Singapore Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) ahead of its 10th anniversary in 2025.

A number of key topics were discussed, including:

- Singapore's energy requirements
- the importance of food import from Australia to Singapore as the pandemic underlined limits to the supply chain
- Professional Services issue where overseas trained people are unable to get certification in a particular professional area
- The response to Malaysia's ban on the import of live chicken
- Low rate of birth among Singapore citizens
- Single family offices or multi-family offices
- Lower tax environment in Singapore.

Defence briefing on Australia-Singapore Military Training Initiative

The delegation was briefed by Australian Defence Advisor, Adam Spinks on the defence relationship between Australia and Singapore, noting that this relationship is deep and extensive.

As Singapore has national service, time is spent in Australia doing training and activities in places like Shoalwater Bay, Greenvale, and Pearce air-base. Many of the ministers in the Singapore government have done military services and spent time in Australia and this creates an excellent relationship and memories of doing military training in Australia.

The delegation discussed the Australia – Singapore Military Training Initiative (ASMTI). This initiative works to build Defence capability, enhance Australia's bilateral relationship with Singapore, and provide enduring economic benefits to Central and North Queensland.

It was noted that up to 6,600 Singapore Armed Forces troops will train in Central Queensland for a single nine-week period in a year.

Friday 15 December 2023

Meeting with the Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry and Australian High Commission staff

Staff from the Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry and Australian High Commission staff and delegation members had a wide-ranging discussion. The following items were discussed:

- Singapore Australian Free Trade Agreement and its benefits
- Digital Economy Agreement
- Green Economy Agreement
- Plurilateral agreements and bilateral agreements and how their success is measured
- Ways to improve Singaporean investment in Australia
- Singapore's National Hydrogen Strategy
- Sea Dumping legislation and passing amendments to the London Protocol.

Lunch at Cenzo Restaurant

The delegation had lunch at Cenzo, an Italian restaurant owned by Drew Nocente, a chef originally from Queensland.

The delegation was hosted by His Excellency, Mr Allaster Cox with Mr Neal Parekh, nominated Member of Parliament, Singapore, and Mr Phillip Forrest AM from the Singapore Institute of Directors.

Tour of Parliament House

The delegation toured Parliament House in Singapore, visiting the chamber and observing some of the technological innovations that are provided for members such as the use of QR codes to quickly access chamber documents.



Delegation members at Parliament House, Singapore

Call on the Speaker of the Parliament of Singapore

Speaker Seah Kian Peng and parliamentarians from the Singapore-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group

The delegation discussed the strong relationship between Australia and Singapore, and the critical value of the shared work on the green economy and shipping.

Informal meeting with members of the Australian Chamber of Commerce, Singapore

The delegation had discussions with members of the Australian Chamber of Commerce at Raffles Hotel.



Delegation members and members of the Australian Chamber of Commerce, Singapore

Saturday 16 December 2023

Asian Civilisations Museum

Asia to the Americas Exhibition tour by Mr Clement Oon, Principal Curator.



Artefacts at the Asia to the Americas Exhibition

Return to Australia and the conclusion of the delegation

After concluding its final engagement, the delegation transferred to the airport and separately returned to Australia arriving on the morning of Sunday 17 December 2023.

Delegation Program

Sunday 10 December

- 2240 Arrive Kolkata from Australia, via Singapore
- 2300 Depart airport for Oberoi Grand hotel
- 2345 Arrive Oberoi Grand hotel, check in

Monday 11 December

- 0845 Briefing from Consul-General, Ms Rowan Ainsworth
- 1000 Meeting with CenturyPly
- 1115 Meeting with importers of Australian pulses
- 1215 Visit Nature's Basket retail store to inspect Australian goods
- 1300 Lunch discussion on the Australia-India Audio-Visual Co-Production Agreement
- 1515 Discussion with Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- 1630 Meeting on the Economic Co-operation and Trade Agreement (AI-ECTA) with importers and exporters
- 1930 Cerebral – In Conversation with Kishwar Chowdhury, Bachi Karkaria and Kounteya Sinha
- 2200 End of days program

Tuesday 12 December

- 0800 Breakfast meeting with Mr Aritra Sen
- 0920 Visit Mother Teresa's Tomb
- 1015 Visit Victoria Memorial
- 1100 Visit New Market

- 1145 Return to hotel and check-out
- 1430 Depart Kolkata for New Delhi
- 1645 Arrive New Delhi, transit to Leela Palace Hotel
- 1830 Attend reception celebrating 150 years of Rio Tinto
- 2100 End of days program

Wednesday 13 December

- 0915 Breakfast with Mr Mahesh Jethmalani, Member of Parliament Rajya Sabha, Bharatiya Janata Party
- 1030 Engagement with the Association of Australian Education Agents in India (AAERI) Executive
- 1145 Wine roundtable with Indian wine importers, including short briefing on state excise system
- 1300 Lunch and India briefing with His Excellency Mr Philip Green OAM, Australian High Commissioner to India
- 1430 Attend High Commissioner's maiden speech on Australia-India relations, followed by networking session with select Indian foreign policy and business stakeholders
- 1700 Engagement with Indian green hydrogen, solar PV and critical minerals stakeholders
- 1830 Attend Christmas reception for Indian Parliamentarians – High Commissioner's Residence
- 2150 Overnight flight to Singapore

Thursday 14 December

- 0605 Arrive Singapore, transfer to Fairmont Hotel
- 0715 Refresh
- 1400 Visit to Kranji War and Military Cemetery and wreath laying
- 1500 Head of Mission briefing

1600 Defence briefing: Australia -Singapore Military Training Initiative

1700 End of program

Friday 15 December

1000 Briefing: Singapore Ministry of Trade and Industry

1200 Lunch hosted by the High Commissioner

1400 Tour of Parliament House, Singapore

1430 Call on the Speaker of the Parliament of Singapore

1600 Function with members of the Australian Chamber of Commerce, Singapore

1830 End of program

Saturday 16 December

1000	Visit to Asian Civilizations Museum with Tour from principal curator
1300	End of program
Various	Transfer to Airport
	Depart Singapore for home ports