

Three cheers to Fed Square Diwali Celebrations

TED BAILLIEU

ALAAM NAMASTE!

I would like to wish everyone *Shubh Diwali* for November 9 and I have to say that last month's Diwali celebration at Federation Square was simply amazing! The colour, music, energy and sheer exuberance of everyone there was a delight to experience.

It was overwhelming to rejoice with thousands of friends displaying so much enthusiasm throughout the event and I was deeply touched by the warmth and friendliness shown to me from the South Asian community.

Over 50,000 attending the festivities throughout the day can't be wrong. With 10,000 more people than last year's event, it appears that most of Melbourne's Indian community visited the festival at some stage throughout the day. It was great to see thousands of fellow Melburnians also joining in the celebrations.

While I was there, it was wonderful to meet the Indian High Commissioner Designate Mrs Sujata Singh, and the Indian Consul General Ms Anita Nayar. My thanks to the Celebrate India Inc organising committee for putting together a great show and for inviting me to the festival. I can only see Diwali getting better and better every year.

The Islamic festival of Eid also coincided on the day, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan and I am glad that so many members of Victoria's Indian Muslim community could also join in the celebrations with everyone at Federation Square.

I have received many positive and very encouraging messages since the Diwali celebrations at Federation Square, and after last month's column in the *Indus Age*, so I would like to thank everyone for their kind remarks and for their ongoing support. I also want to assure you that I will be there to represent your community and will be working hard to address your concerns in the future.

As you know, Diwali and Eid are celebrated around the world. With approximately 7,000 South Asians moving to Victoria each year to live and work, and many more coming to study, it is good to see the number of festivals across the state gradually increasing. I am aware of several gatherings and functions including the other major Diwali celebration that was held at Sandown Racecourse in Noble Park.

This festival brings the whole community together and has become a very important part of Melbourne's and

Victoria's cultural calendar. I look forward to working with the Indian community wherever possible to improve on the celebration and I would encourage the Melbourne City Council and the Victorian Government to continue supporting Diwali in every possible manner.

I hope the festival of lights brightens all our lives over the year and brings peace and prosperity to all.

Before signing off, I am sure that many of you are looking forward to this summer's cricket season. I would like to congratulate India for winning the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup, but Australia got their revenge in the recent seven-match one-day international series in Ind'ia.

It will be an interesting tour this summer when India and Sri Lanka come to Australia so I look forward to some exciting cricket in coming months.

If you have any problems with housing, education, violent crime, police, health care, transport, consumer affairs or any other area of State Government responsibility, please do not hesitate to contact me with your concerns. You can write to me at Level 4, 157 Spring Street, Melbourne, 3000 or e-mail me at ted.baillieu@parliament.vic.gov.au

The author is the leader of the Opposition, Victoria

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