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India Rising? Asia's Huge Question

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Ebony Bennett [00:00:02] Good day, everyone, thanks for joining us. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute, and welcome to our webinar series. I want to thank you all for joining us, and I would like to begin today by acknowledging that I live and work on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and pay my respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was obviously never stated, and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. The Australia Institute does do these webinars at least weekly, but dates and times do vary, as longtime watchers will know. So make sure you head on over to Australia Institute dot org dot AGU to find out all the details for upcoming webinars. Just a few tips before we begin today to make sure that things run smoothly. If you hover over the bottom of your Zoom screen, you should be able to see a Q&A function where you can ask questions of our panel. You should be able to upvote questions from other people and also comment on questions. A reminder, if you can, to please keep things simple and on topic in the chat or will boot you out. And lastly, a reminder that this is being recorded and will put up a recording of it on the Australian Institute's YouTube channel later on. And you should also be able to find out on our website as well. So this webinar is part of an ongoing series that we're doing with Australian Foreign Affairs, which is the country's leading foreign affairs journal. Here's what this issue looks like. You should run out and grab yourself a copy. But until midnight tonight, Australia Institute supporters have access to a special discount. I think Kate is going to post a link to that in the chat. If you haven't got your copy yet, I really urge you to do so. It's a great read. The 13th issue of Australian foreign affairs and this one examines the future of India. It's a rising giant. He's unsteady growth and unpredictable political turns, writes questions about its role and power in Asia. It explores the challenge for Australia as it seeks to improve its faltering ties with the world's largest democracy a nation whose ascent, if achieved, could reshape the regional order. And today, I'm delighted to introduce every bit of Gary, who is a multi-platform journalist and former foreign correspondent based in Canberra. She's a correspondent for Monocle, a columnist for the Lowy Institute's The Interpreter, and she contributes to various of the local and foreign media outlets, and her essay explores the fast growing Indian Australian community and its potential to reshape

Australia's ties to India. And Professor Michael Wesley is Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the International Sorry, Deputy Vice-Chancellor International at the University of Melbourne. He has extensive experience in international strategy and relations and has worked in higher education, government and the private sector, and has published a lot on foreign policy. And his essay begins the Journal and it interrogates the future for India and Australia, and looks at some of the likely challenges, opportunities and threats facing the two nations. And last but not least, we've got Alan Bain. He's the director of the Australia Institute's International and Security Affairs Programme. Alan has extensive experience in international policy, national security policy and defence policy and prior to coming to the institute, and he was Penny Wong, senior foreign policy adviser. Thank you for joining us, Michael Addy and Alan. Thanks so much. Michael, if I can begin with you, your essay, as I said, really begins this issue and you go into the history of Australia's relationship with India and the many ways in which we've kind of never quite aligned happily. What do people need to understand about the Australia India relationship, do you think?

Allan Behm [00:03:45] Well, thanks very much, Ebony, and terrific to me to be joining you and such distinguished panellists. I think, as I say in the essay, the Australia India relationship with was born troubled. It was troubled by different attitudes towards race. It was troubled by different policies towards international relations. India adopted a very strongly Nairobian foreign policy in the early years, which which rejected any notion of power politics. Of course, India was a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, whereas Australia was a very steadfast ally of the United States and a very paid up member of the Western Alliance during the Cold War. So for much of the history of independent India since 1947, Australia and India have looked at each other and the world in very, very different ways, and there have been really significant legacies to deal with. And and I think what we've seen really developed over the last decade or so in terms of the growing of our relationship has been remarkable given how estranged the two countries were for most of the 20th century.

Ebony Bennett [00:05:15] Hmm. We'll come back to dive into a few more details of your essay, but Artie, I want to come to you next. You've obviously focussed on the Indian diaspora, even touching on in some places, the experiences of your own family. And I was really struck by your observation of how fragmented that community can be here in Australia. I wonder if you could just expand on on that for people who perhaps haven't read the journal yet.

Aarti Betigeri [00:05:46] Thanks very much for having me, Ebony. So I always described India as not one country, not one entity, but Europe, and I think it is the EU. It's a it's a loose collection of independent states, each with their own separate culture and history and language. A lot of cases cuisine, social norms, social dynamics. So to kind of when you think collectively about India, it's actually a collection of independent individual states and cultures, not just one united entity and always was like that. You know, its history was as princely states, no pre British Raj times. So that's carried over to Australia. So back when my parents came out 50 years ago, there weren't that many Indian migrants, so they did them together. Now there's like, I think the last camp is that there's a few hundred thousand in Australia, I think 700000 Indian people with Indian heritage. So there's more likely to be people from your linguistic group, from your cultural group, from your religion, from your subgroup, from the city you came from. So people are just more likely to kind of silo off

and hang out with just those people, which is great for them, as I point out in my article, but not so great for the community as a whole. If there's not one unified voice, there's not one individual spokesperson for the community. There's not one kind of collective ability to project a voice into the India, into the Australian community, and very, very vitally. There's no real potential for there to be any political power or political presence because there is that fundamental community.

Ebony Bennett [00:07:36] Yeah, I want to come back to that political presence a bit later, but I can just see a few people in the chat posting questions. Just a reminder, if you can pop those in the Q&A box, that would be most appreciated so I can find them easily later. Sometimes they get lost in the chat. I can see we've got 300 people on the line with us. Say, Thanks so much for joining us. Michael, I want to come back to you next. You wrote in here that Australia, it's not clear that India is prepared to to play the function that Australia may want it to. In terms of the relationship, I wondered if you could tell us what role is that that you think Australia has in mind for India and why might India not be prepared to play it?

Michael Wesley [00:08:20] Yeah. Look, I think the first place to start is that Australia has a unique history with with great powers. We've been heavily dependent on great powers for really since European settlement in Australia. First the British and then the Americans. We expect great powers to look after us. We rely on them. For a sense of existential security, and we tend to see the world through their through their eyes, it means that a country with the, you know, with the size and or the lack of size and the lack of resources of Australia tends to see the world as a great power would see it. We become obsessed by things that happen around the world and we expect to have a voice that some some would say is is outsized for our actual significance on the world stage. And I think that Australia tends to look at other great powers when they're not Britain or the United States and judge them according to how much they can help us, how much they can provide a sense of security for us and and whether we can start to identify with how they see the world. I say my my sense is that India will not play that role for Australia. It is very much a country that values its strategic autonomy. It very much sees the world through its immediate geographic environs. It is confronted by really two hostile neighbours that are aligned with each other, as I say in the essay. It's a similar situation to that which Germany faced for most of the 20th century, where it faced the possibility of a two front war against combined adversaries, and India will remain obsessed by that. So I think that in that sense, India won't be the sword of great power that Australia expects. And the other the other point I would make is is a slightly more theoretical point, and that is the rise of India and the United States. India relationship really is the harbinger of the development of a multipolar region, a region that is not dominated by one power. So it's not dominated by the United States. It's not dominated by China. But it is a region which is balanced amongst a number of great powers. That is certainly the wishes of much of Southeast Asia. And but that is not a region that is familiar to Australia. We've become familiar with a region that is dominated by one power or another. And once again, that will require us to rethink the way that we look at the world and how we practise our statecraft.

Ebony Bennett [00:11:28] Yeah. Alan, I wonder if you wanted to respond to that?

Allan Behm [00:11:31] Well, I mean, how can you respond to that? It's absolutely correct. Michael sort of summed it all up just just perfectly. I think the the issue for Australia always is that we're looking for a great protector. We're not really looking for partners. And as we look out for great protectors, we really understand the nature of the protector. I mean, what character the protector has. And we really understand what the protector is looking for itself. I mean, it's high time that Australia looked at its international relations much more in terms of how it forges partnerships than it, how it creates protective arrangements. And Michael is completely correct that that India has no interest whatsoever in extending any kind of protective umbrella to anybody else. And this is the point that Artie made at the very, very beginning. I mean, India is not a monolith. I mean, it's easy for us to look at it and say, Well, it's got a flag and it's got a capital city and it's got a prime minister. And my word doesn't it ever share values with us. But the fact of the matter is it doesn't. It doesn't share values with us. What it shares with us is a very deep seated wish to manage its own future and to manage the future of its citizens, but its citizens. It different from ours, represent a whole set of different cultural dynamics so that India, in many respects for over 2000 years, has been a sort of a centrifugal society, with all the bits pushing away from each other not actually coming together. And if we don't understand that, if we don't understand the dynamics of India, then we can't possibly have it as a protector. And even to have India as a partner requires us to be much more sensitive to the nature of India itself. And that, I think, is a is a journey that Australia has got to embark upon urgently. I do also note in Michael's essay that, like everybody else who writes about India, he ends his his title with a question mark. And we all do that because we're dealing with something that we don't fully and. Understand. And let's you understand it, honestly, you can't make much in the way of headway, so I don't want to get blown about this, but Michael's made some very, very profound points. One hundred and fifty per cent in agreement, what is was what he said.

Ebony Bennett [00:14:00] 80. I think the way you just described it earlier that we need to think of India more as Europe. That's definitely going to stick with me is a useful way of understanding it better. But I want him to come back to the real precarity that I think shone through when you were describing the experiences of, in particular, I think Indian students who are studying here in Australia and the profound impact that the pandemic has had on them and their precarity here as well. And he talked a lot about the the real chain of exploitation, it seems to me, from the pipeline of Indian students into skilled migrant visas and all those kinds of things. I wonder if he can just tell us a little bit about that experience and what it's been like for students because it really did strike me that just the precarity that you described.

Aarti Betigeri [00:14:56] Yeah, it is a really precarious existence for a lot of them now. I think that is the best starting point is to kind of understand that Indians use studying as a pathway to migrate to Australia. So it's different for different communities. For example, Chinese students usually study here and then go back that Indians really do use it as they waited to actually eventually migrate here, settle permanently. I mean, it's and that kind of cuts across all education levels. I'm studying it a new I'm doing a master's at the moment and one of my co students last year. She has a doctorate from Harvard but decided she wanted to migrate to Australia, and her pathway was again to do yet another master's degree at Amy. So usually Indians already have qualifications. They decide to come here. Their parents see it as an investment in the collective future of their family, so they sell land or, you know, withdraw all their savings to pay for their education, or they borrow money from their

family and the community. Then the students say Here they've paid all this money to get an education. They come here and they do low skilled or semi-skilled work in petrol stations. They drive Ubers, they work in construction sites and often they don't know their rights and that it's something that really works to benefit business owners, as we have as has been proved, you know, with the whole 7-Eleven scandal. Then they finish their education. They have to do internships three to six months of unpaid work. That means they have to leave their work or they have to work reduced hours. So again, they kind of being exploited for their labour because often their previous qualifications from India aren't properly recognised here only or work experience isn't recognised or any local experience counts. And then, as I say in the essay, they emerge. They're fully trained, fully educated, they've got an Australian education, they join Australia's workforce. And really, the whole point of attracting so many migrants from India is to grow Australia's economy. You know, that's the whole point about extremely high migration intake. So at every point Australia wins, you know, they get the fees, they get the the cheap labour, they get the free internships and then they get the Labor.

Ebony Bennett [00:17:19] Yeah, it was, I think, to knowing how much the government really just left in particular foreign students and not just Indian ones, completely out to dry during the pandemic, when there was lots of income support offered for a lot of other Australians. Although universities were amongst those excluded as well, it really did. Just struck me how much in common that has with the overall insecurity of work that we've seen be a driver of the pandemic, the young people being excluded from housing. And then they've got that extra layer over the top of precariousness of not having secure visas or secure permanent residency, those types of things. I really do urge people if you can tear down, grab a copy. The essays are really wonderful. Michael, I want to come back to the point that you were making about the multipolar regional order as opposed to, I think you described as the Helio centrism of Australian foreign policy and going back to, as you said, India's non-alignment policy. If you could just describe, I guess, how that history of India of non-alignment influences the way that it operates in the world now and understands its power as we kind of move away from having, you know, one major power, as you were describing.

Michael Wesley [00:18:45] Yeah, sure. Look, India has has had a really interesting strategic history, to be honest. It has played a very kind of idealistic and, you know, role in terms of being a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement, but in other ways, India does look like other great powers. So if you go all the way back to Nehru, India sees the Indian Ocean as a particular strategic zone that it does not want hostile interests lodging in. In many ways, it's very similar to the Monroe Doctrine that was adopted by by the United States in the 19th century. And in many ways, it's very similar to the way that Australia has usually seen the South Pacific and arguably still does see the South Pacific. And so there's there's almost a schizophrenia to the way that India has used its power. In one sense it is. It has issued the use of power and and denounced the use of of power by other great powers. But in another way, it sees itself as the protector of South Asia and the kind of warden of all of this of the Indian Ocean. We've seen it willing to intervene in its in its neighbours. It intervened in Bangladesh in 1971 and intervened in Sri Lanka. It's intervened in the Maldives, often at the sometimes at the invitation of these countries. But it does see itself as playing this protective role in South Asia and and more broadly in the Indian Ocean. And I guess the point that I make in the essay is that the real strategic interest that brings Australia and India together is their shared interest in the Indian Ocean

and their shared interest in maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean and their shared concern about China's growing role in the Indian Ocean. I think that is going to be the central dynamic that drives India and Australia closer together.

Ebony Bennett [00:21:07] Alan, would you agree with that?

Allan Behm [00:21:09] Yes, I do. I think that India, as we're saying a bit earlier, India starts from itself and its own interests. Of course, it is quite an introspective country in many respects. Again, because of the internal pressures that that characterise India, very much so as it looks around its neighbourhood, it is looking at its neighbourhood as extensions very often of its own long cultural history. It's not an interventionist power. I mean, one of the the odd things in my life was to go to the the Commonwealth War cemetery at Yokohama to find that there are a whole lot of Indians who were buried there. And as I looked at that, I thought, What on earth were these guys doing here? It's just not that kind of country. So India is not an interventionist power. It's very much a power which is about sustaining its own identity in its own position. So for Australia, we have some very deep common interests over the Indian Ocean. All right. But with India, we also share some pretty important interest in the stability of South East Asia and. Point at the very beginning about the nature of the Diaspora in Australia. We have a diaspora of diasporas actually in Australia because many of the people in our Indian community actually don't come from India. They come from Fiji or they come from Malaysia. They come from the United States or Canada or Britain or anywhere South Africa. So we've got to understand that the Indian diaspora, as it now comes back into Australia, is an extremely leavening diaspora. It's a fabulous group of people, but they bring with them their own cultural histories. And for that reason, you can't look at the Indian diaspora as being India. What you have to look at Indian diaspora as being is a new generation of Australians that are going to build our society to be a very different sort of society from the Anglo society that we like to imitate.

Michael Wesley [00:23:20] And then I just jump in there Ebony Bennett. In many ways, Australia is becoming more like South East Asian countries like Singapore and Malaysia, with which we obviously have large Chinese and large Indian diasporas living there. And that trend is going to continue. That is what the demographic trend is taking us towards.

Ebony Bennett [00:23:43] Yeah, absolutely.

Allan Behm [00:23:45] And Ebony Bennett is a big strategic issue for Australia. I mean, we we don't leverage that nearly enough, which is the point of the question mark at the end of Michael's level. And I think it's very much the point that he's been making about the nature of the diaspora in Australia that we don't understand what a fabulous asset we've got. In the same way as we don't understand what a fabulous asset we've got without Chinese and Vietnamese communities in Australia know and to our natural strengths.

Ebony Bennett [00:24:15] Yeah, Audie, I wanted to come back to you and in particular, that question that you referenced in your essay, where are the Indian Australian politicians? I think if you look at other Anglo countries and certainly other Commonwealth countries. But even if we just go back to the motherland in the United Kingdom or in the USA, we can see Indian politicians at the highest levels of government, but not really so much in Australia.

Aarti Betigeri [00:24:46] Absolutely. And I actually so quickly touched on Alan's point before about all the soldiers headstones in Yokohama. It's the same thing in Gallipoli. I know it was full of Indian names, and that's something that's just not really touched on this recently in the last few years. An Indian journalist wrote a book about World War One involvement by Indian builders, which I will look up and put into the chat if anyone's interested, but just to speak to Ebony's question about political participation. You would think that, you know, with the history of India and or subcontinent settlement in Australia and with the numbers that we should have representation, there are none at the federal level. There's Dave Sharma, but I don't. I think he very much distance and distances himself from his Indian heritage. I don't think he speaks for the community or about the community. Lisa Singh certainly did, but as we know, she's no longer buried. There are. There is some state level. There is the New South Wales MP who is from Woolgoolga, whose family's been here for a few generations. I'm sorry I forgot his name, but really there is not. There is not representation that reflects the the size and the makeup of the community. And I was listening to the Australia Indian students chat with Joe McCarthy last week, and he did say, Look, that's going to come as the community grows, political representation will happen. I don't think it'll just happen. I think it needs to be courted, and that comes down to systemic issues, but also cultural issues and the systemic ones are that there is no pipeline like Indians are not being targeted and trained and pushed into prominent roles and made part of political parties plans for the future and cultural. It's just not what we as a community do. I'm second generation. I would say all of my Indian friends who I grew up with are doctors, lawyers, engineers or small business. You know, it's all about financial stability for Indians. Our parents came here. They came from pretty precarious financial circumstances in India. You know, I'm talking about pro-legalization 1991, when it was basically a Soviet style kind of economic framework in India. So everyone is just poor. They leave India, they come to Australia. Elsewhere, they're looking for financial security and stability amid the values that were instilled in us not to be public places like me being a journalist that was like way out there for my generation, no one else did it. It was just not, you know, something that anyone could relate to at all. But, you know, my parents came out in the era of doctors. So it was really that pattern. That wave of migration was all about the very highly skilled Indians. Now, of course, it started it a bit, but I just can't see. We're not raised being told you can be a politician or you should be a politician. It's not seen as being financially secure or just even very relevant to what we want to achieve as a community.

Ebony Bennett [00:27:49] Mm-Hmm. And before we go to questions from the audience, which I'll get to very soon, I can see a number of questions piling up there. Ari, I did want to ask you in particular, you've highlighted as an upside to the crisis the visibility of the Sikh community and the volunteerism that they have exhibited through the bushfires and the pandemic, delivering meals and things like that. I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about that.

Aarti Betigeri [00:28:17] I think now the the Sikh community in Australia is really on the map, and I think what's important to point out about that is that they've used their own culture to gain acceptability and credibility in Australia. You know that that notion of service, it's kind of embedded into the Sikh religion. It's called Seva. So Sikhs, who are very pious and religious, they're looking for ways that they can, you know, serve their communities. So with the bushfires, they literally just rolled up to towns were like, Do you guys want some free food? They set up their tables and they gave out food, and that's how they did it. It was not structured, organised. And I think now Sikhs are real in Australia are really synonymous with their efforts during the pandemic and during the bushfires, and I'm sure that that will continue.

Ebony Bennett [00:29:08] Mm-Hmm. Absolutely. All right. We might go to questions from the audience now. I can say we've got just over three hundred and thirty people on the line. If you've got a question, you can type it into the Q and a function that we've got there. There should be a little box where you can type your question in. The first question I've got from Tony Miller is he says that that he has heard that India will overtake other countries as the major manufacturer of the world. Do you agree that that's the future for India and do you think that's a positive or a negative? Michael, I wonder if I might ask you to reflect on that one.

Michael Wesley [00:29:52] Well, let me start by saying I'm not a I'm not an economist, Tony, but I think that there's a possibility there. But there are also some major hurdles to get over take for India to get to that particular place. China became the world's manufacturing, the largest manufacturing country in the world, mainly through foreign investment. American firms, Japanese firms, Korean firms, European firms that saw two things in China that they really wanted to benefit from. One was low wages and the other one was a government that was prepared to bend over backwards to welcome in foreign capital and and foreign industry. India certainly has the first. But I doubt it has the second. The Indian government, although it's not as determined to be, you know, self-sufficient as it was for the first, let's say, 40 years of India's independence, it is still very loath to drastically liberalise India's foreign investment laws. We've seen some manufacturing firms set up in India. The Koreans are quite forward leaning in that sense. The Japanese are starting to do that. Some American firms, some European firms. But I think by and large, India is still seen as a difficult country to invest in. And and so I think that that spectacular rise of manufacturing that you saw in China between the late 1980s and the late 2000s probably won't be replicated in India. It may be a slower burn path towards manufacturing significance, but it certainly won't be a Chinese trajectory that would be my my view.

Ebony Bennett [00:32:01] Mm-Hmm. The next question is from David Balance, and this might be one for you in the first instance, Alan. He says despite the recent surge in discussion about the Quad, the fact remains that India will be hard pressed to project any significant naval power into the Pacific and trying to find it difficult into the Indian Ocean, notwithstanding other things. So while we certainly do share interests in the Indian Ocean, how reasonably can we expect that a future India would consider our middling power consents in the archipelago and Southwest Pacific as overlapping with its own interests as a major or great power? Alan, I'll start with you on that one.

Allan Behm [00:32:41] It's a pretty major question, and I reckon all of us could talk about this for the rest of the day. It's a very big issue. Actually, what we're looking at at the moment with the Quad, I think, is for partners that have got absolutely different objectives that we don't share objectives in the Quad. What we have in the court is quite singular and in my opinion, divergent objectives. And it is what worries me actually about the current nature of the Quad with its, I think, overweening emphasis on defence and security matters without thinking about what are the real strategic underpinnings that will support long term strategic stability in Asia, where we will where we all live and where the United States retains interests. And that is not resolved. It's a case of four different for different people in a single bed or dreaming different dreams. And I think that until we broaden the base of the Quad to think about how it relates to what's going on in Southeast Asia and particularly and and obviously the ASEAN countries, what's really happening in North Asia with China, where the Chinese and Japan relationship is going? Then the Quad will just be a funny sort of discussion group sitting on the margins of things. And I don't know that that's really where any of the four partners want to be. And while I remain largely focussed on China or some kind of putative enemy, I don't think it'll go any further. It's really going to flip that over completely and look at the region as a as a large enterprise in the same way as the Europeans have managed to do since the Second World War. Now, even in Europe, it's not entirely successful. Britain's had a walk away. So that creating something like that in Asia, where we've got a few other tools like Epic and maybe a bit of the G20, certainly. The ASEAN's structures, until we are able to relate those to the Quad, I think the Quad is simply just another little talk shop that might serve some utility in broadening Australia's interest and access to the world, but doing very little for any of the other three partners.

Ebony Bennett [00:35:09] Michael, did you want to add anything to that?

Michael Wesley [00:35:11] Look, I agree with that. The other thing I would say, Alan, is that I worry that the Quad is actually distancing us from Southeast Asia. You know, South Southeast Asia in general. I think a lot of the ASEAN, the leading countries in the UN, worry that the Quad is is taking initiative and stability away from from ASEAN itself, something that is of paramount importance to Southeast Asian countries. And so in many ways, while the Quad makes makes sense at one level, it doesn't make sense at another level. Australia, its future, our safety, our prosperity must be forged in partnership with countries around us, particularly to our immediate north. And I would give a shout out to James Curran's excellent essay in in this edition of Australian Foreign Affairs, and we need to be very aware that that if we allow the Quad to dominate our foreign policy making and our strategic policy making, then we will be putting a major wedge between ourselves and Southeast Asia.

Ebony Bennett [00:36:24] Mm-Hmm. This next one is for you. Doherty It's from Nishad who asks Why is it that we don't understand and engage our Indian diaspora as an asset to the extent that we should? And what's preventing a more wholesome engagement for something this?

Aarti Betigeri [00:36:43] I'm going to come back to Alan's point about the question mark at the end of every headline about India. I think Australia just doesn't get it, doesn't simply doesn't understand India, and I think that's from every sphere. You know, I've worked in newsrooms in the ABC and SBS, and I can tell you there's not a lot of Indian literacy going on there. You know, I just I listen to what people say about India, and it's all very reductive. It's all cricket and curry. And you know, it's that there's not a lot of understanding of what India is all about. And I think that, of course, is going to carry through to the Diaspora. I also think that, you know, when you're a migrant to another country, you're forced to kind of take your home culture and stuff it into a box and just pull out the bits that are easily comprehensible or explainable to a lot of populations. That's what Indians here are forced to do, like colourful weddings and to Bali and loud Punjabi music, that's any kind of representative of one very small corner of India. It's not, you know, it doesn't reflect what's going on elsewhere. I think one side effect of the growth that the Diaspora is the importation of political conflict or identity conflict from India. So earlier this year, there was an attack by Hindu nationalists on Sikhs on account of Sikhs in Harris Park in western Sydney. I just read the other day that one of the main instigators of that was deported back to India, but he received a hero's welcome in India. You know, that didn't get very much coverage, so I think as the Diaspora grows and as the the relationship grows, I think Australians now are very, very cognisant of the fact that Australia's future is, you know, very intertwined with that of India's through the Quad and through our kind of shared issues with China. I think that literacy in the wider public is growing, but it'll take more and it'll take it'll take people who are prominent and willing to speak out.

Ebony Bennett [00:38:57] Mm-Hmm. The next question I might put to the whole panel. It's from Wendy Tubman. And she asks, how serious is India about tackling climate change, especially in light of the relationship between Adani and Modi? I guess that's a question about Adani here as well, who would like to take a first crack at climate change?

Aarti Betigeri [00:39:19] Aarti, I can. I lived in India for nearly nine years recently. It's not serious at all about tackling climate change. You know, I've breathed that polluted Delhi Air. It is unbelievable. It is so thick and heavy. In short, you can't live a normal life in Delhi. All my friends and I are leaving Delhi. When the Modi government came in, one of the first things they did was to water down environmental regulations to make it easier for corporates who wanted a less regulated environment to work in. There is one saving grace. India has a Green Court, an environmental court that operates kind of like our Family Court does, where it specifically was set up to hear and tackle environmental cases. So, yeah, it's had some Adani issues.

Ebony Bennett [00:40:09] Yeah, certainly a few to to work out there. Allan, I know you've got an extensive background in climate change. Audi was touching on the issues of pollution in Delhi there. We've certainly seen similar issues in Chinese cities drive reforms to reduce emissions there. What are your hopes on India and climate change?

Allan Behm [00:40:32] Look, the position of India, as the leader of the the sort of developing country group in the Conference of the Parties is a very ambiguous one. What what most of the developing

countries say and there's some justification for their claims, is that the West has become rich on the basis on the back of really serious environmental pollution and global warming. And here's the West now posturing to change the rules and in a way that will disadvantage countries that are seeking to develop their economies. So the extent to which you have a prime minister like Morrison and a prime minister like Modi, who are both past masters at whipping up the spin but not delivering the policy that will support movement on climate change, really means that nothing much will happen until in India. As in China and Australia, we all actually legislate to to bring targets into play and then have sanctions for those who don't meet them. And until we do that, we don't have a rules based international order underpinning climate change. There are no rules. There are simply statements of intent. And India makes noble statements of intent. India is very good at making noble statements of intent. We sort of second graders in that particular game, but I think until there is some real substance internationally, India will continue to develop its its economy on the back of hydrocarbons, and that is something that's not in India's interests. But it will remain so I think until the tipping point is reached and then there is or necessarily concerted global action with sanctions.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:27] Michael, is there anything you'd like to add to that?

Michael Wesley [00:42:29] Look, I agree with with Ari and Alan, but let me add a note of optimism here that one of the wonderful things about India is its deeply ingrained culture of social activism. This, of course, goes all the way back to Gandhi and the independence struggle and some of the most articulate and fabulous environmental activists in the world are in India and and they have the ability to make things very, very uncomfortable for the government. So while I agree in general, I do think that there are grounds for optimism as well.

Ebony Bennett [00:43:07] Yeah, and certainly Australia is in a glass house when it comes to any throwing any stones on climate policy. The next question is from Lions and Becks, who asks what reparations should India receive from Australia and England from the 400 years of theft committed by the East India? Company, these strongmen ended up in Australia for colonial rule and killing black people here, I wonder who would like to touch on the legacy of the East India Company?

Allan Behm [00:43:39] Oh, dear. The Parthenon marbles come immediately to mind. I don't call them after the pier, I call them after where they came from. Look, this is a huge question, and I don't think it's actually framed in a way that allows an answer. The history, it's there. The first thing that has to happen, I think, is the history. It's got to be accepted. And in prepping for this discussion this morning, I got out William Dalrymple's fabulous, fabulous book The Anarchy last night. I mean, it is a most important book, and I hope everybody watching this programme today actually reads it because it helps you understand something about contemporary India. You know, what happened to India was extraordinary. It was essentially robbed and raped. And that for a very long period of time and it reverberates now. Many of India's current attitudes towards capitalism are deeply cultural because of the experience that it had over a couple of hundred years under a group of accedes, essentially corporate thieves. And the purpose of Dalrymple's book actually is to warn us about the modern form of corporate theft, not just about the history of the East India Company from Persian

sources actually written in Persian, which is fabulous. I made it to it. You see the East India company from the inside. I don't think it's a question of reparation. I think it is a question of recognition, though recognition of what's happened and an understanding that that what did occur to India must not sit underneath the way in which we maintain our current attitudes. So to that extent, it is the same question as recognition of the statement from the heart, for example, of at one moment with the first Australians, which is, I think, probably the highest national priority for Australia. If we were to do that, we would radically change our image right around the world. Mm-Hmm. And the way in which I think we make amends for what happened in India.

Ebony Bennett [00:45:53] Would anyone else like to add to that or I've got another question here.

Michael Wesley [00:45:58] Just just very quickly, the anarchy is a wonderful book. Another fantastic book on this topic is, of course, Sashi Thoreau's inglorious empire, in which he talks about, as Alan said, the theft and rape, but also the British. The the the invocation of some of the other curses of modern India, such as the caste system, which the British deepened and made much more inflexible. So all of these things, I think. Need to be. And it's not only the British, the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese all have an enormous amount of atonement to make.

Ebony Bennett [00:46:42] Mm-Hmm. Well, the colonial powers and the next question is from Neeraj Nanda, who says Why? Who asks Why is Australia silent on pressures on democratic and civil liberties inside India? And how can one ignore issues facing minorities and other community vulnerable communities in India? Marty, can I throw that one to you? Sorry.

Aarti Betigeri [00:47:10] Thanks. I think Australia absolutely should be more vocal in its support of those minority groups that are currently being oppressed in India. It is caste based. It is religious. You know, we're seeing whole religions being systematically excluded and denigrated in India. It is community based. It is, you know, there's this whole issue of. You know, are they Bangladeshis or are they Bengalis, are they Indian of any of the people who've just illegally entered India? We're seeing that in Islam at the moment. I think Australia definitely has a role to play in pushing back against some of those issues with civil liberties transgressions. Unfortunately, I don't think that's going to happen. I think it's political. I think Australia is has too much of an interest in maintaining and maintaining and bettering its relationship with India. And it's important to point out that that's kind of from a position of being in the back foot. Australia hasn't been in a position of power in its bilateral relationship with India for a very long time. India really has been the one holding, you know, holding all the strings, and now it's kind of realised that it's in our interests to have a good relationship with India. We will return your phone calls, we will come to the table, we will decide to bestow the honour of our friendship onto you. So Australia is very protective of that, and I don't think it's going to do or say anything to disrupt that, unfortunately.

Ebony Bennett [00:48:50] Mm-Hmm. Allan, we certainly don't see any reticence when it comes to Australia criticising, for example, the human rights record in China, though it seems to me we were

ignoring lots of things for for many, many years. How does Australia pick and choose where it chooses to criticise the human rights records and civil problems in other countries and where it doesn't for people who perhaps aren't RFA with foreign affairs?

Allan Behm [00:49:18] Look, I think in the way in which we conduct our human rights policies, we're very good at getting up on top of the top and screaming and shouting and pointing the finger and giving lectures and all of that sort of thing. Our own domestic history is not that flash, actually, and we've got lots and lots of things that we should do here and then encourage other countries to do the same because it actually makes for a better country. And and to my way of thinking, and I've had a lot to do with this matter around caste and structure and so on. And I mean, it is one of the one of the enormous obstacles that India faces to becoming a really open, great society. I mean, I did my thesis at the ANU on the man of the Dam Trust, which is about essentially the rules for caste and and it is a shackle that holds India back for us. We shouldn't be saying you've got to do X, Y or Z. What we need to be saying is that what works for us is an open, inclusive society that liberates the talents of everybody in our society, no matter where they come from or what their gender is or what their religion is. So instead of pointing at India or pointing at China and saying you don't do these things properly, we should be saying the way in which we do it works really well for us. You ought to try it because it might actually work well for you too.

Ebony Bennett [00:50:47] Hmm. Well, Marco, did you want to add anything to that?

Michael Wesley [00:50:53] So I would say that what determines when we speak out about human rights and when we don't is very much to do with our strategic interests. I mean, we were quiet about Indonesia's human rights record all through the Suharto years. At the moment, we're saying almost nothing on Myanmar and the terrible situation that's occurring there. We said almost nothing about what Myanmar did to the Rohingyas when when that terrible situation was occurring. And we've only just found our voice on what's happening to the wiggers because suddenly we've we're at odds with China strategically and we don't see any strategic downside from stop from starting to criticise them on those human rights issues. So I think I think we are. I think we're very two faced and we are a country that upholds our strategic interests more than we care about human rights in other places.

Ebony Bennett [00:51:58] The last question I know the last question. We've got a little while yet. Michael Bradley's question is Australia has quite a long history of misusing educated immigrants for cheap labour. How might we improve this? And surely not only by improving awareness of employment rights? Ari, you touched heavily in your essay on those issues of insecure work and and other things, but that, I guess, is is a much bigger question. Would you like to kick us off on that one?

Aarti Betigeri [00:52:30] All of I feel like this isn't really my wheelhouse, but I'll try to. I'll try to answer it. I think Australia would do well. Also maybe recognise international qualifications and international work experience and have a framework in place where employees, you know, could

maybe refer back to, you know, the government to find out what you know, what the you know where that particular qualification sits in reference to the Australian qualifications. I think that's really important. I think blind CVS is also a really good idea.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:15] Wait, I wondered if I could ask you just before we came on, we were quickly discussing, you know, also the shifting goalposts that people find when it comes to applying for visas and other things like that. Could you tell us a little bit more about what kind of situation that people are facing?

Aarti Betigeri [00:53:34] Look, the people that I've spoken to have said that, you know, they need, they told when they come out here, you need 65 points. That's really hard to get in itself. When they come out here, they satisfy certain, you know, they they they get those points and they told an owner, you need 100 points. The goalposts keep shifting and that's I've had people contact me since the issues come out saying, thank you for recognising this. This is the absolute hell of my existence. The shifting goalposts. Now I'm told I've got to go out and do more education. And you know, implicit in that is, is that shifting goalposts about creating more opportunities for Australia's education system to milk a bit more money out of out of students? That is the question they're left with, and they really are felt left with this idea of, you know, are we just cash cows to Australia when they're very serious about wanting to migrate and join our society?

Ebony Bennett [00:54:28] Yeah. Michael, did you have any thoughts on that?

Michael Wesley [00:54:32] Look, what I would say is it's not it's not my own point, but it's a point that was made by a ball Ribisi, who is a specialist in kind of migration patterns that Australia is in effect, setting up an underclass here, something that that we, you know, as a as an independent federated country. You know, one of the main reasons for the white Australia policy was a refusal to countenance the creation of of an underclass. And as a bull says, you know this, this migration education nexus is actually setting up an underclass in Australia. And really, the Australian population is not being brought into a proper conversation on what is occurring and what the implications for Australian society will be.

Ebony Bennett [00:55:27] Mm-Hmm. Alan, would you like to add anything?

Allan Behm [00:55:31] I'm aware of the time Ebony, and I'm not ashamed to bring in the R word because I think that it deep in the Australian psyche is, is racism. And I think that what we're seeing here is just another expression of that. Anecdotally, it is not nearly so difficult for people from Britain or the United States or Canada or New Zealand or anywhere else to come and settle in Australia, as it is for people from India. And I think a lot of it has to do with a reluctance on the part of bureaucrats to open the place up. I mean, Abbott's dad was my professor at the ANU, Syed Abbas Rizvi, and and and he brought his family here. That's why Apple and his and his brothers a year and

his sister. So the point I'm making is that these are fabulous people who come in, but we have got race based barriers, which I think are an enormous obstacle and are desperately, desperately unjust and unfair.

Ebony Bennett [00:56:32] Mm hmm. Well, I'm afraid that's all we've got time for. I want to thank our panellists, Audie. Better, Gary. Professor Michael Wesley and Alan Beam. This is the latest issue of Australian foreign affairs. You can pick it up in any good newsagent or bookstore. And don't forget, there should be a link in the chat that Kate will provide. There's a discount for Australia Institute supporters. You can order that up until midnight tonight, and you might have been sent that in the email invitation that you got for this as well. It's really great. The essays from Audie and from Michael are well worth reading, but so are the others. It's a really good issue. I recommend it to you. Thank you again to the panel for your time today and and thank you to everyone for all your great questions. As always, I'm sorry I couldn't get to all of them, and we had more than 300 people on the line with us today. So thanks very much for your interest. You can join us over the next few weeks. More exciting webinars next week. We've got our fortnightly pole position with Guardian Australia and Essential Media and coming up, we've got a few more exciting webinars on. Issues relating to the pandemic and inequality, and we're hoping to talk to Chief Minister Andrew Barr as well. All those details should be going up shortly on our website. And don't forget to be subscribe to our podcast, follow the money where we take big economic issues and explain them in plain English. This week we looked at the Australia Institute for Climate of the Nation report and the changing national attitudes towards climate change in the country. You can find that on iTunes or wherever you normally listen to podcasts. Thanks so much for your time today. Thanks for watching, and we'll hope to see you soon. Thanks, everyone. Fine. Thanks. All.