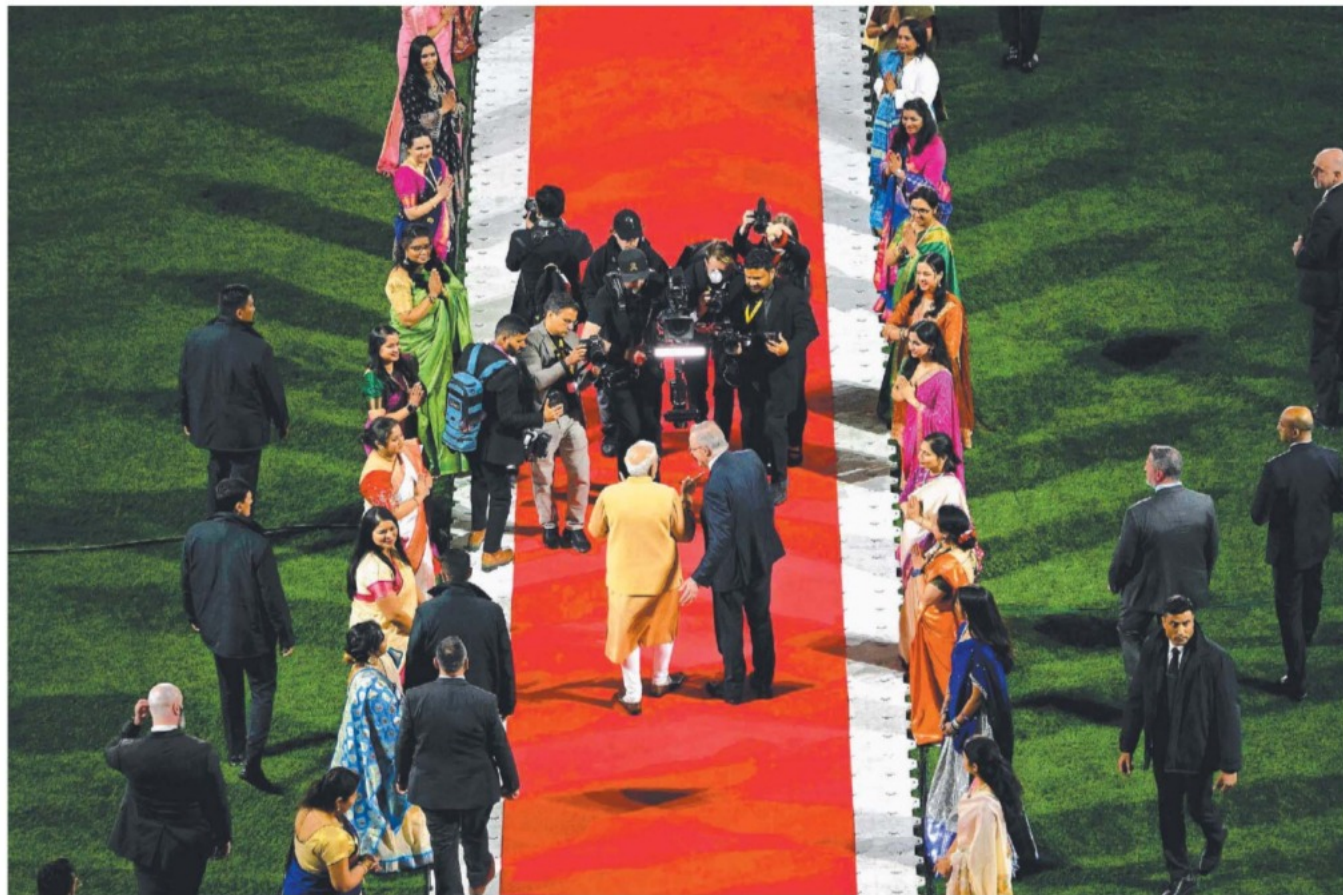




Main, Anthony Albanese and Narendra Modi walk towards the stage at the Melbourne Meets Modi event; top and below left, traditional Indian dancers; above, Modi supporters out in force; below, police hold back a group of protesters



Taxpayers hit for Allan's 'Modi mania'

EXCLUSIVE

ANTHONY GALLOWAY
VICTORIAN POLITICAL
EDITOR

Victorian taxpayers will foot a substantial share of the bill for Thursday night's Narendra Modi event at Marvel Stadium, as Premier Jacinta Allan seeks to maximise the political dividend from the Indian Prime Minister's three-day visit.

The Victorian government's financial backing of the event comes as Labor intensifies efforts to consolidate support among Victoria's Indian-Australian community, a key voting bloc in Melbourne's outer suburbs.

After greeting Mr Modi on the tarmac alongside former home

affairs minister Clare O'Neil on Wednesday night, Ms Allan secured a prime-time speaking role at Thursday's stadium event and will hold a private meeting with the Indian leader on Friday.

Ms Allan was listed as a co-host of the Modi Meets Melbourne event alongside Anthony Albanese, with up to 30,000 people expected to attend. The Australian understands the Victorian government was a major sponsor of the event, contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars, including towards security costs.

The event, organised by the Australia India Foundation, had been months in the making and was attended by prominent figures from the Indian-Australian community, including the Australia India Foundation's Jay Shah and Australia India Institute chief

Albanese is all the way with his opposite number

Continued from Page 1

remain a major concern in Canberra, especially in the defence space.

But co-operating more closely with India on defence and energy will, it's hoped, make it less reliant on Russia.

Australia needs all the friends

executive and former Labor senator Lisa Singh. Angus Taylor and Victorian Opposition Leader Jess Wilson were also in attendance.

Speaking at the Marvel event, Ms Allan said: "Victoria respects India, we value your people, we

can get right now in a more uncertain and dangerous world. The same goes for Modi.

Beijing's launch of a nuclear-capable missile into the Pacific on Monday will have been noted with similar alarm in New Delhi as it was in Canberra, Washington and the Pacific island capitals.

The US remains Australia's most vital alliance partner, but questions over its reliability are growing.

This has positioned Indo-

welcome your students, your businesses, your ideas. India is not just a country we trade with, it's a country we trust. You are welcome here, your children never have to choose between being proudly Indian and proudly Australian,

Pacific heavyweights India and Japan as critical partners going forward. Both relationships are in excellent shape.

To top things off, Albanese and Modi agreed to fast-track negotiations on a new comprehensive free-trade agreement, which the Indian PM said would be "balanced, ambitious, and win-win".

This has been an elusive goal since an interim deal was signed in 2022, but Modi's high-level commitment to get it done may

help to clear away some of the institutional hurdles.

It has been a big week of international engagements for Albanese, who signed a new military alliance with Fiji on Monday, visited the Solomon Islands, brought into force a new mutual defence treaty with Papua New Guinea, and took his PNG, Samoan and Tongan counterparts to the footy on Wednesday night.

Talk about a diplomatic hot streak.

privately with Mr Modi on Friday. Victoria is home to Australia's largest Indian diaspora, with more than 370,000 residents claiming Indian ancestry.

The Allan government has made cultivating support among migrant communities, particularly Indian- and Chinese-Australian voters, a central plank of its re-election strategy.

Since becoming Victorian Liberal leader last November, Ms Wilson has sought to rebuild the Coalition's standing among migrant communities, including Chinese and Indian-Australian voters, but Labor is seeking to capitalise on Mr Taylor's tougher immigration stance, including his proposal to prevent non-citizens from accessing welfare payments, while highlighting the prospect of a future Coalition government in

Addressing Indian Australians, he added: "Your entrepreneurship and innovation make our economy more... dynamic."

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