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## Word of the Prime Minister

WORD OF PRIME MINISTER GUY VERHOFSTADT  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF  
THE TEJAS-EXHIBITION 'ETERNAL ENERGY'  
BRUSSELS, CENTRE FOR FINE ARTS

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Madame, Mister President, Ladies and gentlemen

Having just returned from an official visit to India last week, it is a great pleasure for me to open this unique exhibition on ancient Indian art here in Brussels, both the Belgian capital and the capital of Europe. As I rushed through New Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai on a hectic investment promotion tour, indeed little time was left for cultural events. While we had intensive and fruitful discussions with the Indian President and Prime Minister and with you, Madame Gandhi, as well as with many other high officials and CEO's, five days is an awfully short time to visit a country a hundred times bigger than Belgium and having a population twofold all countries in Europe taken together. But in India culture is everywhere. As a matter of fact India is not only the greatest democracy on earth and a born-again economic superpower in the making. It is also one of the cradles of civilization. For thousands of years the Indian subcontinent was a miracle of the most remarkable cultural achievements, surpassing Europe in its wealth and productive capabilities in such an impressive way that the era of European discoveries started in the late 15th century by seeking a seaway ... to India. As we all remember Columbus sought this seaway by sailing west, discovering America. But he was so convinced that he had found a seaway to India that he called America's original inhabitants 'indians'. Indian cultures have played a major role in the spiritual development of mankind, not only on the Indian subcontinent but on a much larger scale. Bronze and stone witnesses of these spiritual traditions can be seen everywhere in India, but for the first time – in their greatest variety – also in Brussels. 'Tejas' is the Indian/Sanskrit name for this unique exhibition. Tejas means, as I learned, 'eternal energy' or 'cosmic energy'. I understand it as the creative energy inspiring Indian culture and Indian civilization since at least three thousand years, surviving any age, overcoming any obstacle, constantly renewing – or reincarnating – the subcontinent, as only 'eternal energy' can do. I guess this 'eternal energy' to be a major source of the remarkable Indian political and economic recovery these last decades. For wealth and prosperity are not only fueled by economic growth and political institutions, but equally by culture and tradition. But 'Tejas' could also be understood as the spiritual energy India will need to solve the many problems ahead. Indeed, it must be a Herculean task to lead a nation of more than a billion inhabitants, providing stability and prosperity for the many, not only for the few, guaranteeing justice and peace for the greatest variety of peoples and cultures, re-awakening hope and prospect for the poorest. Madame Gandhi, we are particularly pleased that you accepted our invitation to be here today. As Chairwoman of the leading political party in your country, the century-old Indian Congress Party, and even so as heir to the Nehru-Gandhi prime ministers who lead your country to independence nearly 60 years ago and who shaped and preserved the democratic political institutions unique on this scale in Asia, we feel honored and grateful for such an exceptional presence. Being a leader of India with Italian roots makes you a unique and perfect ambassador of European-Indian friendship. Over the years the partnership and cooperation between Europe and India has been steadily growing. I do hope that not only Belgians but many Europeans may find their way to this exhibition, perhaps finding here millennia-old common spiritual roots or recovering a taste of Indian culture, never completely absent in

this most western part of the Euro-Asian continent. Therefore I have the honor to bestow upon you, in the name of Belgian King Albert, the honors of a Grand Officer in the Order of King Leopold. Please accept this as a token of our highest esteem for your achievements in favor of the Indian society as well as for your beloved husband and your mother-in-law, Rajiv Gandhi and Indira Gandhi, both prime ministers assassinated while preserving democracy in India, and for your country. Thank you for being here and being with us today.