

Diwali Hindu Festival



PAUL LYNCH MP
STATE MEMBER FOR LIVERPOOL



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Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [11.51 a.m.]: Sydney is currently experiencing a large number of Diwali festival events. In origin, Diwali is a Hindu festival. Accordingly, it is most usually celebrated by people with an Indian background. Obviously that means people born in India, but also people in all parts of the Indian diaspora, such as Fiji. Diwali is usually translated as "festival of lights", although a more literal translation might be a "row of lights" or "array of lights". Its origin is the Sanskrit word "deepavali". Eurocentric and culturally limited commentators sometimes describe Diwali as a Hindu Christmas. That is accurate only in that both Diwali and Christmas are significant celebrations. They have little else in common. Diwali is the dispelling of darkness and ignorance. The lighting of lamps represents the destruction of negative forces of evil, intolerance, hatred, violence, fear, greed, oppression and injustice. In that sense it has what are obviously very universal and non-denominational messages that speak of social tolerance and harmony, which must be central to any civilised society regardless of its theological or non-theological base. There have been a substantial number of Diwali functions recently. Diwali is the beginning of the Hindu New Year. It fosters a spirit of living in harmony. It is the most important and most widely celebrated event in the Hindu calendar. The first of the events that I would like to mention was organised by the Hindu Council of Australia. It was a Deepavali event held on 12 October at the Fairfield Showground. The council has been organising it there, I think, for the past four years. The event featured cultural shows, dance, drama, music, and the inevitable and delightful stalls of Indian food. Many thousands of people were in attendance—an estimated 15,000. It featured a number of guests, including Laurie Ferguson, Tony Lord from Fairfield council, and Mr Ganapath—from the Indian Consulate. I pay tribute to the work of Dr Balasubramaniam in helping to organise that event.

Another event was a pre-Diwali celebration held at the Hilda Davis Senior Citizens Centre at Liverpool on 18 October. It was organised by the Sanatan Amar Jyoti Association of Australia, and I had the honour to attend it. The patron of that association is Vijendra Prasad, someone who is well-known to me and active in Liverpool. A Diwali festival was held on Sunday 19 October at the Northumberland Street car park in Liverpool and there were many thousands of people there, and significant funds were raised for community purposes. It is one of the biggest regular events held in Liverpool. It was organised by the Shree Sanatan Dharm Sabha of New South Wales. The president of that association, Gyan Singh, is a good friend of mine. The organising secretary was Surendra Prasad. It was beamed live by radio to Fiji, and that made some of my comments about Fijian politics quite interesting.

On 25 October a Deepavali festival was held by the Mukti-Gupteshwar Mandir Society at its site at Eagleview Road Minto. The chairman of that organisation, who invited me and did much of the organisation, is Prem Misra. It was quite interesting. The temple at Minto is spectacular and unique, being largely underground. It is said to be the only man-made Hindu cave temple in the world. It is also significant because it is consecrated with the 13th enlightened icon of Lord Shiva. The icon is called a jyotirlinga. This icon was a gift from the King of Nepal and it is the only one outside India. It attracts many devotees from India and other parts of the world on pilgrimage. The event reflected the principles of Diwali. Apart from Hindu devotees and adherents, and the honourable member for Strathfield and myself, also present were Imam. Amin from the Minto mosque and Father Kevin, a Franciscan Catholic priest, also from Minto.

On 29 October there was a Deepavali festival celebration in Parliament House organised by the honourable member for Strathfield. A number of distinguished people were present, including, once again, Mr Ganapath, who is very much a credit to the office he represents.

Within Liverpool there are significant Indian communities, often from Kamataka, but particularly a very large Fijian-Indian community that came to Australia fleeing oppression in Fiji. It is an interesting community because it went from India to Fiji, essentially as slaves, and now has come from Fiji to Australia. Those people have made a very positive contribution to the community in Liverpool.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed-Parliamentary Secretary) [11.56 a.m.]: It has been interesting and enlightening listening to the honourable member for Liverpool's contribution. He follows the honourable member for Strathfield in pointing out to us the work the Indian community is involved with in the Liverpool electorate. The Diwali festival events—or Deepavali, as we saw recently in this building—introduced us to a community that has taken Australia to heart. It was nice to hear of the celebrations held during the month and that one of them was broadcast by radio all the way to Fiji. The honourable member for Liverpool is very enthusiastic in his support of his Hindu-Indian community and undoubtedly they appreciate the good work he does in representing their interests in this House. I congratulate the honourable member for Liverpool.

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Speakers: [Lynch. Mr Paul](#); [Newell. Mr Neville](#).

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