

Jagdish Bhagwati Festschrift Gala Dinner
Remarks by Martin Feldstein

Thanks very much. Well, I'm delighted – delighted – to be here with Jagdish and Padma at this very impressive birthday celebration. Jagdish and I have been good friends since we both arrived in Cambridge at nearly the same time in the late 1960s. Although he was at MIT and I was at Harvard, there was a natural connection between us because my wife, Kate, was then a graduate student doing her Ph.D. at MIT, and was taking Jagdish's course in International Trade. So, even before I really got to know Jagdish or Padma well, Kate would come home at the end of the day and tell me about the exciting things that she had learned in Jagdish's course on International Trade. So, indirectly, I guess I have to count myself, am pleased to count myself, as one of Jagdish's students in International Economics. Jagdish, it's a bit late to thank you – but now is the time to do it – for the education that I got, at least indirectly, in international trade.

Jagdish, in my mind, is the consummate economist, combining contributions to applied economic theory with important analysis of economic policy issues. In his early years, Jagdish's papers were required reading by generations of graduate students. And in more recent years, his articles and his books are required readings by policy officials and, indeed, by anyone who is interested in the policy issues of international trade and investment.

The papers at this conference, both today and tomorrow, emphasize Jagdish's contribution to International Economics. That, of course, is as it should be. But I want to remind everyone about another important focus of Jagdish's work, and that is India, as we heard from Arvind and from the Prime Minister in his letter. After he graduated, Jagdish went back to India and stayed there as a professional economist for seven years. That was a time when the Indian economy grew very slowly. Growth and progress in every way were blocked by a vast complex of government regulations. And Jagdish was an outspoken critic of the old status quo. Indeed, even after he left India to come to the United States in 1968, Jagdish remained an important voice on Indian economic reform. For the past eight years I've been going to India with a group of NBER economists to participate in a conference with Indian economists and Indian government officials. And Jagdish, I'm pleased to say, came to most of those meetings.

It was really quite fascinating to see how Jagdish is treated in India. He is not treated just with great respect, but, I would say, with real reverence. And it's easy to understand why. Jagdish was a pioneer, as the Prime Minister said in his letter, in writing about the reforms that were needed in India, both in the domestic Indian economy and its relations with the world economy. Much of this anticipated the reforms that began in 1991, when Jagdish's good friend, the current Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, was Finance Minister. And, although Jagdish is known to all of us for his teaching and his writings about the world economy, Jagdish has continued to be a voice for sound policies in India, and, bit by bit, the Indian government is moving along the lines that Jagdish outlined many years ago.

So, I think we can all admire Jagdish for contributions to economic science, to economic policy, and to Indian reforms. And we can all look forward, Jagdish, to reading what you will be writing in the years ahead. Thanks very much.