

HON KON VATSKALIS MLA Our very own Northern Territory Minister

The Hon Kon Vatskalis MLA, is not just a Minister. He is the Northern Territory Minister for Business and Employment, Minister for Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources, Minister for Tourism. Costas Vatskalis was born on the island of Kefallonia in 1957 but he lived in and was educated in Athens until 1983, when he decided to immigrate to Australia with his Australian wife. He studied public health in Perth and, following his first wife's death in 1988, he remarried and moved to Port Hedland and then Darwin. Since coming to Australia, Mr Vatskalis has been passionately involved in politics. A Labour candidate in Perth, in Darwin he established the greek-speaking department of the Labour party. For years he worked for the benefit of the greek society, he taught greek, and had a greek radio show. As a Darwin MP, he assisted in creating a greek department at tertiary level. In 2001, he was a candidate for Casuarina and won the seat from the Liberals, who had held it for 27 years. His percentage in the elections was 55% back then, 68,5% in 2005 and 64% in 2008. He could have hardly imagined that from the suburb of Ilioupolis in Athens, he would end up a Member of Parliament and within a week's time from his election, be voted in a Minister! As the Tourism Minister, Mr Vatskalis speaks with pride concerning the natural beauties of his state. "A tourist will never find the same beauties and starking contrasts as he will in the Northern Territory. There are tropical forests, red sand deserts, huge national parks, wonderful beaches, wetlands and unique animal and plant species. There is everything and nowhere in the world can one see as many stars in the sky with a naked eye." He also says that his state is inhabited by 101 different nationalities who speak 120 different languages, which all create a uniquely multicultural society. Darwin has around 7,500 greeks which consist about 10% of the total population of the city, most of which are from the island of Kalymnos. The first greek settlers arrived in 1876 and have offered a lot towards the development of the state. Mr Vatskalis is the longest standing NT minister, and is determined to remain in politics as long as his voters - many of whom are Aborigines - continue to trust in him. "The key to success", he says, "is to be down-to-earth, to pay attention to people's needs, to be disciplined, to be fair and honest and to consider oneself as the servant of the people."

Marathon surgery gives twins the chance of separate lives

Two years of planning have culminated in new hope for conjoined twins, writes Nick Miller.

WHEN conjoined twins Trishna and Krishna began their separate lives at 11am on Tuesday, a surgeon described it as a "surreal" moment.

"For two years [it] has been planned," said Leo Donnan, the head of surgery at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital.

"Getting to that point, when everyone has known these girls as one, with their individual personalities - to see them as separate human beings is a pretty amazing moment."

Trishna and Krishna were born by caesarian section to parents unable to care for them, and were put in care in an orphanage in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Two young Australian volunteers at the orphanage, Danielle Noble and Natalie Silcock, realised they needed world-class treatment. Last year Ms Noble said: "I had to help them."

The orphanage was a tough environment, with concrete walls and steel cots, though the workers were well intentioned. Less than a week before the twins arrived, two children Ms Noble had caring for had died, from pneumonia and possible malnutrition.

Ms Noble was determined Trishna and Krishna would not suffer the same fate. But until the Children First Foundation entered the picture, there was little sign of hope, despite her efforts to raise money and attention. For the first 11 months of their lives, the babies



lay there, often holding hands, their health declining. Enter Atom Rahman, who is from Melbourne but works in Bangladesh. Mr Rahman knew the foundation was the twins' best chance.

"Krishna was doing most of the work [in circulating blood] for both of them and she was about two-thirds the size of Trishna," he said. "It is just incredible how far they have come."

The next person to enter the story began as the girls' guardian but has become much more. In words, and deeds, the foundation's Moira Kelly is their mother. Ms Kelly, with Mr Rahman's help, sorted out the legalities in Bangladesh - though the sisters at the orphanage remain the twins' ultimate guardians, Ms Kelly and Mr Rahman are their guardians in Australia.

Ms Kelly began raising the hundreds of thousands of dollars necessary for the operation and pre- and post-operative care, including \$250,000 from one anonymous benefactor.

The twins were flown to Melbourne, where they were admitted to the children's hospital's emergency department. They were assessed as being close to death.

Ms Kelly has cared for hundreds of sick children but has never been as emotionally and physically challenged - or fulfilled - as by these twins.

Last year she was called to the hospital where doctors were deciding whether separating the two was viable. To Ms Kelly's shock, they passed the final choice to her. "I always thought it would be a medical decision but it didn't come down to that in the end," she said. "They said, 'We're sorry about this, but it's your decision'."

The first operation of many was performed at Royal Melbourne Hospital by the director of neuro-intervention, Peter Mitchell. Over the next 10 months there were four more operations, culminating in a marathon 20-hour session gradually to separate the blood vessels the twins shared. Those vessels were pouring blood into the heart of the smaller twin, Trishna, putting dangerous pressure on the organ.

Late last year, inflatable tissue expanders were put in the twins' head, to encourage growth of new skin that would eventually cover their new heads. The expanders grew to contain two litres of fluid - about the size of a soccer ball.

Audi won't become No.1 in Australia, says BMW

BMW Australia says it is ready to repel a local sales assault by rival German car Audi, which has stated its intention to become Australia's leading luxury brand by 2015.

BMW again considers Audi a competitor, with recently appointed managing director Stavros Yallouridis declaring he would "have to keep an eye" on the 'third' German brand that's been catching its compatriots on the sales charts.

Just months after joining the top job, BMW Australia's new boss - fresh from a six-year stint as the head of BMW in Greece where he almost tripled the sales of the luxury brand - has gone against the comments of his predecessor, who declared Audi was not on his radar and the only competitors for the brand here were Lexus and Mercedes-Benz.

Despite obvious similarities between the two German brands, the then BMW Australia boss Gunther Seemann suggested Audi was heavily discounting, which was not in keeping with a luxury brand.

But as he pushes towards BMW selling more than 20,000 cars in Australia, Yallouridis admitted the ambitious Audi

brand - which has declared it will be the best selling luxury brand in Australia by 2015 - is in the competitive mix.

"I think they are a competitor," he said, adding it Audi was "less important" than the other big German luxury brand, Mercedes-Benz.

"We are the leaders in the world and we are the leaders in Australia. So let them chase!" Despite Audi's recent growth spurt - the brand has doubled its market share since 2004 and increased sales by more than 150 per cent - Yallouridis is adamant BMW will remain the most prevalent luxury brand in Australia.

He plans to take "calculated risks" to



build sales in a highly competitive segment that's reliant as much on quality vehicles as it is on brand image.

"There's no way in the world they'll knock us off [the number one position]," he said. "We can sell 20,000-plus ... I really don't think that 20,000 [sales for BMW Australia] is too far away."

Last year in Australia BMW sold 17,263 new vehicles, eclipsing rival Mercedes-Benz (once you remove the commercial vehicles that make up a significant chunk of Benz sales). BMW will next year further grow its ever-expanding model lineup with the addition of the X1 small soft-roader and the crossover-style Gran Turismo, which aims to blend performance with space and light-duty off-road ability.

The two new models will take the number of BMW body styles to 19, which currently includes a hatchback (1-Series), four sedans (3-Series, 5-Series and short and long wheelbase versions of the 7-Series), three coupes (1-Series, 3-Series and 6-Series), four convertibles (Z4, 1-Series, 3-Series and 6-Series), two wagons (3-Series and 5-Series) and three 4WDs (X3, X5 and X6). Yallouridis, who says he has

not set targets yet for the brand's growth, is putting the entire BMW Australia business under the microscope, questioning each part of the business with the view to making changes to streamline the operations. He is even looking at the brand's sprawling head office - BMW owns the land - in the south eastern suburb of Mulgrave, with the view to relocating it.

"It's one of the things we're evaluating ... we're thinking about the whole business," said Yallouridis, adding a decision had not been made. "Relocation is something that might happen ... in three or four years." "Logistics wise it doesn't make sense to be at Mulgrave when people are flying all over the country," he said, suggesting being closer to the airport may be more logical.

Yallouridis says the head office sends an important message to dealers, staff and potential BMW owners so it was important to have something befitting of the luxury brand.

No doubt he's noticed Audi's \$50 million head office that doubles as Sydney's flagship dealership not far from the airport.