



TAIWAN

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. HAROLD HOLT AT GRAND HOTEL TAIPEI

6TH APRIL, 1967

PRIME MINISTER: Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press:

I just propose to comment quite briefly first and then give you the opportunity of asking questions of me, but first may I thank you for your pleasant introduction, and all of you for the very friendly way in which you have greeted me this morning.

I am now nearing the end of this fascinating first visit to Taiwan and the seat of the Government of the Republic of China, and as you will no doubt be aware, we leave at noon for the final stage of this journey I have been making, the visit to South Korea.

This is not the first journey I have made since becoming Prime Minister to countries of South East Asia and the Pacific, but this particular group of countries selected on this occasion includes those which have not previously been visited by me, except for one quite inadvertent stopover for an hour or two while we had an aircraft diverted in the course of a journey I was making a few years ago to Tokyo. That is the only other time I have ever set foot in Taiwan and so this has been a true journey of discovery for me.

I feel that not only have I learned a great deal in the other countries visited, as I expect to do in South Korea also, but my visit to Taiwan, has enabled me to come closer to your leaders, to get to know several of them personally for the first time, to renew old friendships with others, to see something of your quite remarkable economic development, to see at first hand the treasures that you have preserved from your thousand years of civilisation and culture, all these things have been quite fascinating and stimulating for me and I am sure that I shall be in a better position to come to judgement with my colleagues of the Cabinet on matters relating to your country and its problems as a result of this visit here.

I would have liked to express publicly my appreciation to the Government, to the President and the Vice President, the colleagues in the administration for the generous hospitality we have received and for the very enjoyable and instructive time we have had while we have been with you.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, as I understand it, you might have a pre-departural meeting with the generalissimo? Can you tell us any major points to be discussed during this?

P.M. Well, I haven't myself restricted the range of the discussion, it will be for the President to indicate matters to me he might wish to raise. For my part, having already had the benefit of some useful discussions with him at our first meeting, there is no special matter which I wish to raise with him this morning, but I am sure that what passes between us will be mutually informative and in that sense helpful.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, to what extent, Sir, do the people of Australia consider themselves Asians?

P.M. Well, we are not racially Asians, of course, nor are we by historical development of the Asian tradition or culture, but geographically we are in the area of the world where the peoples of the South East Asian area and the Pacific generally, and indeed Asia as a whole, geographically are our neighbours and in substance, as a result of the relationships we have developed over recent years, are very much not only our neighbours but our good friends.

I think the very fact that I have been able in the course of my own short Prime Ministership to visit, on the basis of warm welcome, so many different countries of the area of differing political outlooks and social structures is confirmation that Australia does enjoy very good relations with the countries of the area. This has been, I think, exemplified fully in this visit where I am journeying to four countries very different in political and social complexion, but in each country I have been most gratified by the warmth of welcome which I and my party have received. A warmth which I know reaches not only to me but to my countrymen whom I represent.

It is only in comparatively recent years that Australia has become conscious of its increasing involvement in the problems of the area. This involvement reaches not only into matters of trade but of political co-operation, and over at least five separate sets of issues in the last twenty-five years Australia has found itself militarily involved in the area, so we believe ourselves to be very much part of the Asian scene.

Q. Sir, I have witnessed your troops in active service in South Vietnam. If the war cannot be concluded in limited detail are you going to send more troops down there?

P.M. Well, that is a policy matter which would have to be discussed with my own Cabinet colleagues, and on the advice finally of our own military advisors, and, of course, following a request to that effect from the Government of South Vietnam. We don't send troops there without the approval, and indeed at the invitation, of the Government of South Vietnam.

It will be realised that Australia has other commitments in other parts of Asia, for example, we have troops stationed in Malaysia, Singapore, in Ubon in Thailand, and there is a large programme of training of our military forces inside Australia, which draws on our regular forces to a considerable extent. So there are some practical limits as to how far we can go in a period when we are also trying to press on with the development of an under-populated continent, but when I mention that over the last four years we will have more than doubled our expenditure on defence, it will be seen that we are making a growing contribution to the security of the area generally and the percentage of our gross national product devoted to defence is moving up between 4.5 and 5%.

Q. Do you think that the countries having sent troops to South Vietnam should have a voice about the future courses of their forces in Guam and any other places?

P.M. I am sorry, I didn't get the reference in what.

Q. Countries that have sent troops to South Vietnam should have a voice about the future course of action there, for instance, in Guam or any other places.

P.M. Well, of course, there was a gathering after the Manila Conference of those who had forces involved, and I am quite certain that if there were concrete peace proposals coming forward we should be consulted at all significant stages of such a discussion. We have no reason to complain in Australia of any lack of communication, indeed, we are in very frequent contact with the Government of South Vietnam, I would say through our Ambassador, virtually on a daily basis, and this is true to an even larger extent with communication with the United States of America and other countries whose forces are participating with ours in supporting the South Vietnamese people.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, how do you visualise the possibility of strengthening the ties of Sino-Australian relations in terms of economy and culture?

P.M. Well, I think visits such as the one I have been making and reciprocal visits from your leaders, will be helpful in that direction. We get to know each other more closely and our problems in more depth and detail. As to trade, the briefing we had from your Cabinet Ministers indicated very good possibilities of increasing imports into this country from Australia, as your own economy develops and we would recognise that if this is to be, then Australia must be looking to ways and means of improving our purchases from Taiwan. These are connections, I think, where we can be of help to each other.

I suggested last night, and I was glad to find that the suggestion did not appear as difficult as I thought it might, that we could have on display perhaps at some time in Australia some of the cultural treasures which you have here in Taiwan. One could think of a variety of ways in which the knowledge of the two countries can improve one for the other, and it will be my endeavour to promote this process.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, we understand that Australia has recognised Outer Mongolia recently. We would like to know if Australia has no tendency to establish an Embassy to be used as a listening post what benefit can it get from this representation?

P.M. Well, I would like to comment on that in a little detail. It is a fact that the Government recently took a decision to recognise Outer Mongolia. This was not a matter which had been reached hastily or suddenly by us. It has been under consideration for some time and I want to make it clear that the decision was the exercise of an entirely independent judgement by Australia and was not the product of any pressure or influence from any other source. But we have taken the view that recognition should be given to countries which observe the international standards appropriate to membership of the United Nations and we have put that view forward in respect of Mainland China on earlier occasions. But in the case of Outer Mongolia, they have been members of the United Nations, I think, for six years or thereabouts now.

They have, so far as we have been able to judge, observed the standards appropriate to membership of the United Nations. They are members of Ecafe and Australia next year will be host to Ecafe, and of all the Ecafe members attending that conference Mongolia is the only country which had not, up to this point of time, received recognition, and this did have a varying bearing on the time of our decision. Another factor that had a bearing on it was my own visit here.

Now it may seem strange to some people that one announces a decision which is not likely to be popular in the host country just before you visit that country, but I think you must understand something of the Australian character to recognise the significance and appropriateness of this. I would not like to have come to this country and have said nothing about this matter, and then subsequently, after having enjoyed your hospitality, gone away and announced this decision. It would have been thought outside either that it had the tactical approval of your Government, in those circumstances, or else that objections had been raised which we had not been prepared to accept. So we felt it was fairer and honest - more honest dealing to take our decision on what we believe to be the merits of the case and announce it before my visit here.

The other factor which I would like you to bear in mind is that Australia has, it will be agreed, been a consistent supporter of the Republic of China in the United Nations. We have joined consistently in backing your own moves to maintain your independent position and status, and we were, I think, very helpful to you particularly on this last occasion, when thanks to the efforts of your Foreign Minister and his colleagues of the Government, a very good vote was secured on the issue of recognition.

Now Australia is likely to be more persuasive and have more impact on other countries, if they feel we do have an independent judgement. We do exercise that judgement honestly and fairly than if they get the impression that we just go along automatically with any particular decision, and I think this is well recognised by your Government as being typical of the Australian attitude. We like to feel that we act with firmness and forthrightness but with friendliness and in the case of your own country we can fairly claim to be staunch friends throughout.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, may I know what is your evaluation of the chances of the Chinese people on the Mainland to regain their freedom, particularly in view of the political troubles on the Mainland, after your discussions with our President Chiang and our Vice President?

P.M. I think you would be able to get a much more satisfactory answer on that matter from your own Government here than you could hope to get from somebody as remote from the Mainland as we are. I have been trying as I have gone around, and I have asked the same question in the three governments which I have visited, what is their evaluation of what is going on on the Mainland of China? I am sure that your own government is the best informed of all the governments I have visited and I would hope in the course of this morning before I leave, to have some more information on that matter, as I have a briefing with some of your authorities and also shall be talking with the President, but in Australia we have very inadequate facilities for reporting in any authoritative way in what is going on in either the cities or the countryside of the Mainland.

Any more questions?

Q. Some on the latest immigration policy, I mean your policy as to be understood or misunderstood by Asia?

P.M. Well, I think there is a good deal of misunderstanding of it, not only on the part of the Governments of the countries of Asia. We find a quite understanding attitude amongst them, after all, there is not a country that I know which doesn't maintain a policy of immigration control. But in the sense that there has been some feeling in the past of racial discrimination in Australia I think that experience of Asians who have come to Australia in recent years has helped to dissipate that very largely, and there have been liberalisations of policy which have contributed to this. I pointed out, when a similar question was asked in Hong Kong the other day, that since the war some thirty thousand people of Asia, and others who would have not been admitted under the rules which applied before the war, have come into Australia.

There have been many thousands who have taken out naturalisation at the moment there is some twelve thousand students from Asian countries in our schools and in our universities, sometimes occupying places in universities - in university categories on which quotas have to be imposed for Australian students, and these become very good ambassadors for Australia when they come back. Those of you who visit our country, I am sure, will find friendliness, complete absence of discrimination and a warm welcome to you. But we have a problem of social integration in a relatively small population of people and we think that the trend is in the right direction and this is intelligently perceived, I believe, by the governments of the countries of Asia.
