

ASIAN TOUR 1967

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. HAROLD HOLT, AT MASCOT AIRPORT, SYDNEY

10TH APRIL, 1967

Tony Eggleton has explained that I feel my first responsibility, so far as any detailed report is concerned, is to make my report to the Parliament. I have given an assurance that if Parliament is in session, it should be the first to hear matters of substantial political importance, but I am able, I feel, to make some broad comments to you, and hope this will be of some assistance in the task you have.

First, I would say that this has been one of the most rewarding and valuable official journeys I can ever recall having made. It exceeded my best expectations in meeting the purposes for which I set out. I don't really think it could have gone better from my point of view or, for that matter, from Australia's point of view.

This was, in the case of each of the four countries visited, the first time an Australian Prime Minister had been there. This fact was very much appreciated. You will have gathered from the press accounts that wherever we went we were greeted with not only friendliness but a warmth of friendliness which was very gratifying and encouraging. Those who had feared that our foreign policies might have antagonised the countries of Asia, I think, would have taken some comfort from what we encountered.

I didn't, in any country visited, experience a hostile banner, a hostile voice, a sour look, whether at the official level or amongst the people we met or those we saw as we moved about the cities and the countryside. So I think it can be quite confidently accepted that there is a wealth of friendliness for Australia in that area of the world.

It became clear to me that Australia had become accepted as a member of the Asian and Pacific community, that we were not on the outside looking in. We were regarded as one of the countries of the area involved in its problems and, at the same time, able to make our own useful contribution to it.

The Press tell me that they were very well received wherever they went. It was a mark of the warmth of friendliness which Cambodia, and Prince Sihanouk in particular, feels towards Australia in that the press were allowed to enter there in that substantial body which accompanied me. There is an official policy denying entry to Cambodia for journalists from countries which are held to pursue differing policies in respect of Viet Nam, but our pressmen were made welcome. They attended official functions hosted by the Head of Government, the Head of State and they tell me that wherever they went they were particularly well received.

As far as every area of governmental interest - economic, political and security is concerned - I am sure this visit has contributed very valuably to Australian purposes in all these directions. One of the discoveries for me - and there were many discoveries on this journey - was the strength of South Korea, the extraordinary industrial growth there, the bright trade prospects they see with Australia.

This was true also of Taiwan. Both these countries have very high economic growth rates; both see a rapidly-growing trade with Australia. Both, for example, intend to set up an iron and steel industry, and will be looking to Australia for the iron ore required by these industries. However, I won't go into too much detail on those matters because I shall be elaborating on them in Parliament.

I tried to project an Australian attitude of fairness and friendliness, but the views we put we hold to firmly. I expressed them forthrightly and with frankness but in a spirit of friendliness and they were well received in that spirit wherever we went.

I am sure that my own knowledge of the countries visited, and that of the official party which accompanied me has been greatly improved. We have a deeper understanding, a more realistic understanding of the problems of the countries concerned. It was an educational tour in a sense. That education has led to a better knowledge; the better knowledge has produced a deeper understanding, and out of that understanding there has developed a warmer and more enduring friendship for us.

So altogether I feel that the journey has been very well worthwhile and that Australian interests have been promoted as a consequence of it.

Thank you.
