

PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF THE
KING AND QUEEN OF NEPAL

CANBERRA, A. C. T.

23 APRIL 1971

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. William McMahon

Your Majesties, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen :

Sir, this is the first time a reigning monarch from Nepal has come to Australia, and the first time that a reigning monarch from Nepal has been in the Parliament House of the Commonwealth. We welcome you and we welcome your wife.

Sir, you should know that there has been a long association in one way or another between the Nepalese people and ourselves. Many of us here today, if not all of us, remember the fact that at Gallipoli, Gurkha troops shared the responsibility with our own Fourth Brigade under General Monash. We can never forget their braveness. We can never forget the assistance they gave us under the most troubled and difficult conditions. And I well remember on many occasions, listening to a former Governor-General of ours, Viscount Slim, when he continually referred to the fact that he liked talking to the Gurkhas. He liked talking to your own people, and above all, he liked their steadfastness under action, under active service conditions, and how much he liked them fighting because he knew they would never fail.

But there are other reasons, too, Sir, why we have got reasons for happiness. Our own Colombo Plan was, in the days when I was Foreign Minister - and that was only a few weeks ago - was, I believe, a little out of proportion to the vote that we gave to other countries. I hope it hasn't changed, but if I find it has, or there is a likelihood of change, I can assure you I will be the first one reminding my colleague, the Treasurer.

Now, Sir, we have a Colombo Plan, as you know, and we have already had something of the order of 90 of your young students come here. We welcome them, and we hope that more will come in the days to come. I can't say that we will build up the programme because it is a difficulty for you just as much as it is for us. But we do like them. We regard them as people who are adaptable, people who are fitting into the educational system of this country and I hope they go back much better trained and able to play their part in the future of your country.

And, too, Sir, we have these problems of tourism. Yours is a magnificent country, of grandeur and of plains - of the ranges and the mountains and the plains. Providentially, nature built the ranges on the North and the plains on the South. And I think, Sir, it has been a protection to you and it will, I believe, in time be a protection to others.

But I am sure what we can do is to build up our tourism. At least I know that in the case of my own two children, not only do they know of Everest and of the exploits of Hillary and of Sherpa Tensing, but they also, Sir, would like to come and find the Abominable Snowman, if they could, even if they have to beseech your help, as probably the best guide there is in Nepal, in order to try and find him.

Then Sir, may I turn to you as a person and as a reigning constitutional monarch. I have looked with awe, Sir, at all the portfolios that you have held. Roughly, I have held about fourteen, one way or the other, but I believe, Sir, as I looked at the record, you have held ever so many more than I have. And you have been there less time than I have. I wonder how you fit into them - the Treasurer, as well as the Chief Administrator, as well as the Head of your National Development Corporation, and I believe one or two other portfolios which for the moment the names evade me.

But, Sir, if I can look at what you have done - the World Health Organisation, in education for the young people and the people of the universities and the colleges, in looking after the women and children. I think, Sir, that you have given the kind of leadership that any country in the world, including our own, would be proud of.

And besides that, I was asked today by one of my officials, if I would care to recite "The Man From Snowy River". Naturally it caught me a little by surprise because it is so long since I have heard it. And when they asked me to do it, I couldn't remember the opening bars. But I was told, Sir, that if I did ring you, Sir, as a poet in your own right, you who know the ranges and the mountains so well, would have responded. And I perhaps, Sir, might have been a little flabbergasted and certainly would have been put in the shade with the eloquence of your speech.

But, Sir, may I now turn to your Constitutional activities as the reigning monarch, Head of State and Head of Government together. Sir, if I can refer to three areas in which you have taken a part.

First of all, I want to refer to your activities in what we call the Panchayat System of government, which commences right at the grass roots, and goes through local government and other organisation working up to the central government under yourself, both as Prime Minister and Head of State. Sir, we hope that this scheme is successful, drawing the people into the government at the lower levels, giving them the opportunity to participate, and in time strengthening the very fabric of government in your own country.

But there are two other reforms that I believe will meet with the warmest of warm approval by Members of Parliament and of the Australian people. The first one is your adoption of the rule of law - the application of law to everyone, no matter who they might be and without any kind of discrimination, fairly and judiciously and making sure that every single person in the community has the protection of an independent judiciary. Secondly, the programme of "Back to the Village", designed to ensure that the leadership shall come from you down to the paeons and the people and back from the paeons and the people to the government itself, in combination working in the interests of your own country.

Sir, naturally enough, we want each of these programmes to be successful and we feel reasonably confident that under your direction and leadership that they will be.

In the international field that I have recently vacated, as I said a few moments ago, I knew that on the last occasion I was at the United Nations - the 25th anniversary celebrations - you were there too. Equally, too, can I say that the year before, whilst I wasn't there, I knew that you were there, and that you played your part as the leader of your own delegation and you certainly took a prominent part in the Economic and Social Council.

Internationally, too, with the non-aligned countries, you have taken a very prominent part. First of all in Belgrade and later on in Lusaka. And we, Sir, again if I can repeat these words, welcome the part that you played to try and mould this third force together. To be a force that can make a contribution, and in time a bigger contribution, to try and ensure that there is a better balance of forces in the world, and consequently a greater prospect for peace, a greater prospect of success for the things that we hold dear in your and in our time.

And, finally, Sir, may I say something to you about the grace and charm of your wife. She, too, complements in very nearly every way your own activities - with the young women, with the children, with health and educational organisations, in the arts and in culture, and too, in conservation measures. We welcome you, Your Majesty, along with your husband, and we do hope that in the days to come, in seven days that you are with us, they will be days of unequalled joy for both His Majesty and for yourself.

Now His Majesty himself. I first of all should say this to you as a matter of fact. Normally a reigning monarch under circumstances like this doesn't make a speech. But the mood has caught him - not while he was sitting here in Parliament House, for which he would have been forgiven, but on the way here. Without urging but voluntarily of his own free will, he has decided he would like to say a few words to you in Nepalese, but translated by his Foreign Minister. I wanted you to know this before I called upon the Leader of the Opposition to support the Toast.

But, Sir, I want to assure you before I sit down that we, the representatives of the Australian people welcome you. We know that the Australian people would welcome you too if they were given the chance. Thank you for coming. We will always welcome you back again.
