



# PRIME MINISTER

## VISIT TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA

14 February 1974

"I have come to the end of a most important visit to six nations of South-East Asia - Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Singapore and the Philippines. My visit served two basic purposes. It enabled me to explain at first hand the aims and purposes of the Australian Government's foreign policy and to hear the views of our friends and neighbours on issues of common concern. It also enabled me to set in train official negotiations on a wide range of practical issues, especially in the area of trade.

The results have given me unqualified satisfaction. There are no outstanding differences between Australia and her neighbours in the region. Our foreign policies are fully understood and warmly approved. The Australian Government has established - and our neighbours have recognised - a genuine and continuing interest in South-East Asia. We are now seen as a steadfast and interested partner - a true participant - in the destiny of the region. There can be no turning back from this commitment.

I was struck throughout my visit by the warmth and cordiality of the reception given to me and my officials in each of the countries we visited. I encountered a genuine affection for Australia and her people and a positive and heartening response to the changes and new directions in Australia's foreign policies.

One result of my visit has been a series of decisions in favour of trade and cultural agreements between Australia and the countries of South-East Asia. We have agreed to update our trade agreements with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines and to open negotiations for a trade agreement with Laos.

I was able to explain the benefits of our new policies on Australian investment overseas and our plans for trade concessions for developing countries. These initiatives were warmly welcomed in all the countries I visited.

In a number of countries I was asked whether Australia could supply, usually on a long term basis, commodities of basic importance to their economies. Favourable responses have already been given concerning sugar, wheat and rice to Malaysia, and coal to Burma. Contacts are continuing concerning the supply of steel, nitrogeous fertilisers and liquid petroleum gas to Asian markets. I have made clear in each country I have visited that the increased flow of two-way trade is one of our prime objectives in our relations with South-East Asia.

During my trip I took the opportunity to talk to students and their leaders and gained a valuable understanding of their concerns and aspirations.

I assured the Governments of the region that while Australia still retained her natural interest in the defence and security of South-East Asia, we saw our future involvement in the region - and indeed the best hope for the nations of the region itself - in terms of growing co-operation and mutual assistance in the peaceful and productive areas of trade, economic assistance and social development based on the needs and wishes of the people.

Most important of all, perhaps, in my talks with political leaders and in my public speeches, I was able to lay to rest any lingering suspicions of Australia as a racist country. I trust that Australia's old racist image has been buried forever.

Australia is now closer in spirit and objectives to the nations of South-East Asia than ever before. On the basis of new and enriched understandings, and a common acceptance of the inevitability of change in the wake of cold war rivalries and out-dated ideological obsessions, our country will establish new and lasting friendships with our neighbours. "

CANBERRA. A.C.T.