

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8.30PM



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER - PARLIAMENTARY DINNER
FOR PRIME MINISTER OF BURMA - CANBERRA - 2 APRIL 1984

Prime Minister U Maung Maung Kha,
Distinguished Visitors,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mr Prime Minister welcome.

Australia and Burma are old friends. Since your independence the ties between our countries have grown and strengthened.

The importance we attach to our bilateral relationship has been reflected in the visits which have taken place between leaders of both our countries.

The visit of President U Ne Win in 1974 gave a significant impetus to our relationship, and your visit at this time, ten years later, Mr Prime Minister, is a further important development.

On our side the visit to Burma by my distinguished predecessor Gough Whitlam, the visit by the then Deputy Prime Minister Doug Anthony in 1982, and the Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden's visit to Burma last year, have all contributed to stronger links and a closer understanding between us.

On another level, Burmese students have been welcome guests in our country for many years.

Those Australians who have visited Burma as tourists, aid advisors, and business people, have found in your country and its culture a serenity unknown in Western societies.

Through such contacts our people get to know each other better. I believe that we should work to strengthen such contacts.

Only through these people to people contacts, can we be confident of knowing and understanding each other properly.

Australia's involvement in the Asian region has for some years been increasing. Indeed we see our future as being closely bound up with that of the rest of the region.

Australia has great respect for Burma's strong, principled stance on international issues and for your independent view on the affairs of our region. Burma's moderate, measured international posture does not obscure your importance in the political and economic life of the South and South East Asian region.

It is therefore fitting that we are able to welcome you Mr Prime Minister and your colleagues to Australia tonight.

Mr Prime Minister,

Australia, as you know, is an aligned nation. We attach great importance to our relations with the United States. The ANZUS alliance is a fundamental plank in Australia's general strategic posture.

Burma I have noted has had a long and deep commitment to the foundational principles of the non-aligned movement. Your concern at the departure from those principles by some members of the movement led to your country's withdrawal from the movement.

That decision by Burma reflected the very real importance your country attaches to the maintenance of independence in its foreign policy.

Australia shares a similar commitment to the maintenance of an independent foreign policy.

In this regard I was particularly impressed, Mr Prime Minister, during our meeting this afternoon, at the coincidence of our views on Cambodia. We both are aware of the dangers of isolating Vietnam. We also share a concern about great power involvement in the region.

We both seek with our neighbours in the region ties of friendship and goodwill so that peace and prosperity can be strengthened.

My Government will continue to pursue an independent and self-respecting foreign policy, based like that of Burma on a principled concern for peace and security.

My recent visit to regional countries convinced me of the dynamic economic potential in our area. Intra-regional trade is growing more rapidly than world trade as a whole.

This regional inter-dependence, in both trade and commerce, indicates quite clearly that countries of the region will continue to benefit from each other's growth.

During our discussions this afternoon you outlined your Government's plans to develop your natural resources.

Australia has developed competitive, efficient, world standard expertise in ore extraction, concentration and beneficiation, the transportation of ores, and the establishment and management of mining projects.

Our private sector, which has considerable expertise in mining, transportation infrastructure development, and in the supply of equipment, can play a real part in helping you to bring your plans in this area to fulfilment.

I am pleased that you will be seeing something of our developments in mineral and offshore oil while you are here.

I am also pleased that a delegation from your Ministry of Mines will visit Australia later in the year to discuss in greater detail how we might be able to help Burma's development in these areas.

As we discussed this afternoon Australia proposes to increase its aid to your country with an expanded program of \$46 million over the next three years.

This multi-year commitment will allow greater project flexibility and could also include involvement in the development of your minerals and mining sector.

As I said before, we are old friends. That friendship was amply demonstrated in your gift of Burmese teak plywood to the appeal for the victims of the appalling bush fires in South East Australia in February of last year.

We thank you for that gift.

We were saddened to learn of the loss of life and property occasioned by the partial destruction by fire of the historic city of Mandalay. An Australian contribution to relieve the burden of that disaster has already been made.

The prompt response that each country has made to disasters afflicting the other evinces not only humanitarian sentiment but the mutual regard that exists between our two peoples.

Mr Prime Minister, Distinguished guests

I look forward to the continued strengthening of relations between our two countries.
