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VISIT TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA
Statement by the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Harold Holt
on his arrival in Singapore

I am at the beginning of a short visit to South-East Asian countries which will take me in the coming days to Viet Nam, Thailand, Malaysia (including a visit to Kuching in Sarawak) and Singapore. At this time I am in Singapore purely in transit, but I shall be meeting Singapore Ministers for discussions at a later stage in my tour.

My visit is designed to take me to those South-East Asian countries where Australian forces are serving. Australia has now and immediately in prospect some 8,000 servicemen in the region. Australian forces are involved in the defence of these countries under arrangements based on mutual understanding and partnership. We are determined to be a good ally. I shall be explaining to the Governments in the region the active steps which Australia is taking to expand its defence effort and to shape it for the requirements of collective regional security.

We have taken part in the defence of Singapore and Malaysia for many years and are proud to have made a contribution to the preservation of security and stability in this region. Our forces are now committed in a combat role in Viet Nam, at the request of the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam, in assisting the Vietnamese people in their struggle to defend their national independence against communist aggression. This aggression in the guise of "a war of national liberation" or "people's war" is being relentlessly waged through techniques of infiltration, terror, subversion and direct military attack.

My visit will not be confined to the immediate military and security problems, important as they are. I hope to have discussions with Governments about what Australia can do to assist in the achievement of social progress and economic development. The Australian Government wishes to ensure that the role we play in the fields of economic development, technical assistance, education and in developing the skills of the region, is vigorous and productive. Australia, of course, is already closely engaged in these matters through the Colombo Plan, ECAFE, the new Asian Development Bank and in other ways.

Recent years have seen Australia and most of the countries of South and South East Asia come much closer together under the pressure of events. This has been accompanied by a marked growth of understanding, mutual confidence and respect. It emerges clearly from our political and diplomatic relationships that, despite the separateness of our histories and of our cultural backgrounds, our national aims and external attitudes are very similar indeed - respect for national independence, peace and stability, economic development, widening opportunities and conditions of freedom.

This is my first visit abroad as the Prime Minister of Australia. I am glad that it is being made to the region of South-East Asia where we believe that we have with friendly neighbours a strong sense of common interest and mutuality of purpose.

SINGAPORE,
21 April, 1966.