

## "THE JOB AHEAD OF US IN ASIA"

Extracts from Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt,  
at Opening of M.R.A. Conference, Monash University, Melbourne

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One of the reasons I was attracted to speak to you today was the theme of your Conference - "It's Our Job Australia". I share your view that the job ahead for us in world affairs and particularly in the affairs of this region in which we live is not only tremendously important but for Australia it is a challenge of comparatively recent emergence.

Three-fifths of the population of the world live East of Suez and as I've said when I've been travelling overseas, we can't turn our backs, nor can Europe turn its back, upon the problems of the people who live in Asia. What was our Far East in the literature of my early time in public life has become very much the Near North of this country.

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### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

I would like to tell you something, since we are speaking of our responsibilities internationally, of the way in which Australia has grown both in influence and action in this field. For a very long time in the history of our Federation, external relationships had a very limited interest to the Parliament. It was hard to get the Parliament to accept a debate on external matters. You had some industrial issue that the whole Parliament would be wanting to speak on, some domestic industrial issue - the arbitration system, the social services and matters of that kind. In my earlier years in the Parliament it was a rarity to have a debate on foreign affairs. Now there is no more popular vehicle for Parliamentary speech at the present time than a debate on foreign affairs.

In the earliest period we looked to the United Kingdom. The people who quip me because they say I am all the way with America, at that time were quipping the Government of the day because they said we were clinging to the skirts of Downing Street - if Downing Street could have skirts. You follow the idea. And people, for their own political purposes, choose to take a statement made in one context and apply it far more generally and widely than the facts would justify. I don't think when Andrew Fisher said "to the last man and the last shilling", that people interpreted that as meaning that Australia had surrendered any independence of judgment and action that it might otherwise possess. And when I say that we are all the way with America in resisting aggression in Vietnam, that doesn't imply that we don't have an independent mind and judgment on some of these great international questions. I don't think, if you were to search his heart on the matter, there is one of my political opponents in the National Parliament who seriously believes that Australia has surrendered

that independence which a government should possess.

You may be interested to know just how the Australian activity has grown. In 1901 the Department of External Affairs was established as one of the original Departments of State; but there was so little interest in this work in the Parliament that by 1916 the Department had been abolished. And the function of the Department was taken over by the Prime Minister. Would I be correct in thinking it was William Morris Hughes at that time? He took over most of the functions of that period. He was said to have ruled Australia with his pen. Well, as far as he was concerned, what little there was for External Affairs to do was going to be done inside his own Department. And it wasn't until 1935 that it was re-established as a separate Department of Government. I could give you the figures on staff, which I think are quite revealing, and I am not going back to the early years of Federation. But in June, 1946 we had a total staff in the External Affairs Department, including those overseas and those in Australia and certain people locally engaged in quite minor positions - 410. By June 1966 - twenty years later - the 410 had grown to 1,570. So that you will see that Australia's growing interest was reflected in the growth of the Department of External Affairs.

When I examined the table on this I thought it might be of some interest to you. I was glad to find that, when you look at the geographical spread of these posts the largest number is to be found in Asia and South Asia. There are 19 there, 18 in Europe, 7 in North and South America, 7 in Africa, 3 in the South Pacific; and in addition to those diplomatic posts we have trade posts growing, too, quite steadily around the world, and there are some separate immigration posts which help us with that programme.

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### REVOLUTION OF RISING EXPECTATIONS

Now, what makes the task in Asia, and indeed in the under-developed world generally, so exciting at this time is, if I may quote the words of Arnold Toynbee, well expressed in this passage. "Our age will be remembered not for its terrifying crimes or its astonishing inventions, but because it is the first generation in history in which mankind dared to believe it practical to make the benefits of civilization available to the whole human race." And that is not just a belief held by the more affluent countries, what are known in the jargon of the day as the developed countries, by which we usually mean the highly industrialized countries, but it is certainly held amongst those countries which are learning for the first time in history that mankind's age-old enemies of sickness, disease, illiteracy, poverty, the lack of adequate shelter, hunger, that these things can be conquered, that other countries have conquered them and are going on to even higher standards.

So there has built up what has been aptly described as the revolution of rising expectations. And the expectations are certainly there, and they are complicating international life tremendously because it is one thing to stage a revolution

for your freedom, to establish a separate national entity; but it is a very much more difficult thing to go about the more mundane and humdrum task of supplying the needs of your people. We are seeing this all around the under-developed world at this time, whether it is in Africa, in Asia, or some other part of the globe, that the victory has been won by the politician. He has secured his freedom, he has secured his independence. He has a nation to lead. But the people in that nation are able, through the various modern communications media, to see the more affluent and well-supplied world around them and they want these things. They don't want them as the end product, as is the case in most of the developed countries, of centuries of political and industrial evolution. They want them preferably in the next year and certainly in the next five or ten years. Because it is humanly impossible to do all these things in that time, the discontents build up and these discontents provide the infection for disorder, for challenge, and a threat to the more stable and orderly forms of society which otherwise could be maintained in the country concerned. This is part of the challenge which all of us have to face, because we must recognize the needs, we must recognize the consciousness which exists on the part of the under-supplied people that their needs can be met, or at least they hope, as Toynbee says, for the first time in history, people dare to hope the things which they have accepted philosophically perhaps or with despair in centuries past, that these things are capable of solution, and there are men, statesmen around the world, who believe that also in countries which can make a major contribution. The present President of the United States is one such man who has a vision, not only of a good society at home, but a vision of a better world order around the world as a whole, and is prepared to contribute the wealth, the technical skill, the co-operation, the assistance of this country of 190 odd million people to assisting in those tasks. This year has seen, I believe, a notable progress forward in the thinking of the people of the United States, and certainly of the United States administration, in relation to the possibilities which exist in Asia.

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### AUSTRALIA'S INFLUENCE

Now Australia, you say there is a job ahead of us, and that might seem on the face of it to be rather large a claim for a comparatively small country measured in terms of population to make. But there is force in this, because Providence has placed Australia in a situation where it can exercise an influence out of all relationship to the numbers of our people. In the first place there's our historic relationship with the United Kingdom. Virtually a family relationship, and when I go to conferences in London, as my predecessor and leaders of governments from Australia, as other political persuasions, we are greeted as members of the same family, and that's the atmosphere in the United Kingdom.

They have always been interested to hear what we've had to say - willing to take our views into their own consideration, and it was typical that although I was a

fledgling Prime Minister when Sir Robert retired, in the first week of my own administration I had personal letters, or messages, from Harold Wilson and from President Johnson asking me to continue the same intimate correspondence that they had developed with Sir Robert Menzies. Now this doesn't happen to every country. It happens to this country because our views are respected. We are known as people who express ourselves quite robustly at times, but sincerely and with a desire to help. And so we do have some influence on the thinking of these two great powers, more influence I believe even in my limited experience of just under twelve months, than most Australians would imagine.

Then there are other reasons why we have a capacity for influence in the region of Asia. We don't carry any background of colonial power past. I think it's true that leaders in these countries speak more frankly and freely to us than they do to the representatives of greater powers. They know that we have no territorial ambitions so far as they are concerned. We have no aspiration to exploit their wealth, although the charge on this, I think, has been grossly exaggerated over the years. But we have, and this again is a bond of sympathy with us, problems of a development kind which they face themselves and fortunately for us we've shown a capacity to meet those problems successfully, to build in a not highly promising terrain and climate a civilisation and a standard of living which ranks amongst the highest to be found around the world. They want to know how we've done it. They are glad to have from us some indication of the way we go about things. They welcome the technical assistance that we can bring to them.

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### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

There are at present somewhere in the neighbourhood of 13,000 students from the Asian region studying in Australia. Some 10% of the full-time students enrolled in our universities are from overseas. Over the past few years, some 50,000 students from Asia have passed through our various educational establishments and they can become, as so many of them do, good ambassadors for Australia.

Perhaps our most enduring gift to Asia is in the education opportunities we offer. Asia desperately needs skilled tradesmen and technicians and better educated farmers as well as graduates. Blue-collar work does not have the respect it enjoys in Western countries and training in manipulative skills still lags far behind needs. And here we are helping with gifts of technical equipment to colleges with books and with teachers.

Kuching in Sarawak, is only one of the multitude of examples which could be given. Australian gifts of earth-moving equipment are being used to train local labour. In Singapore we are setting out to equip a second technical school. In Vietnam and Thailand Australian equipment and inspectors are at work on trade training. And the whole

range of Colombo Plan activities from our point of view is largely connected to the technical assistance aspect or equipment which can help the countries concerned to help themselves.

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## FOREIGN AID

It is not only by our own direct foreign aid expenditure that we can help the developing countries of Asia and the Pacific. We can help also by bringing their problems to the notice of other aid giving countries which recognize we have a good deal of first hand knowledge and contact with our geographical neighbours.

We have been involved in the aid field in Asia longer than most. The Colombo Plan set up in 1951 was largely a product of an Australian initiative, and Sir Percy Spender, now the President of the International Board of Justice at The Hague, was the prime mover in getting the programme established.

Early in 1966 we joined the development assistance committee of the OECD. This committee comprises the major Western European aid donors, the United States, Japan, and now includes Australia.

The activities of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, established in 1965, has the aim of co-ordinating the activities of voluntary organizations whose projects in developing countries supplement in a valuable way the Government's official aid programmes. Some of you will be aware of the organizations represented on that council. They include the Australian Council of Churches, Community Aid Abroad and the Overseas Service Bureau. There is of course a crisis of people in Asia, and it is one of the harsh ironies or paradoxes that as we improve health standards where everybody wants to see them improved, and the expectancy of life in some countries, we merely add to their problems of supplying the growing population.

India is a case in point where quite dramatic advances in the public health field substantially increased the expectancy of life.

We shouldn't and we mustn't go into Asia self-righteously selling Western concepts and ways of doing things as the best and only course for these countries who have a history and tradition hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years, older than that from which we draw our beliefs. And we mustn't assume that ours are the only answers and that they must change fundamentally all the things on which they have built up their beliefs.

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## ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

I came across a table the other day which gave some facts about Asian nations - area, population, gross national product, and average output per person. And it is quite a fascinating table, if I just run down a column and pick a few of the countries out of average output per person. You will see the gap which exists at the present time between the more affluent and the less affluent peoples of the world. Australia has an average output per person, and in this table - which is taken from an official U.S. Department of Commerce source - we have the highest average output in the region of 1967 dollars per person per annum. That is spread over the whole population.

Burma	\$75
Cambodia	\$130
Communist China	\$105
India	\$90
Indonesia	\$70

Japan (which of course has made tremendous strides industrially in the years since the First World War, and more particularly since the Second World War) \$878. But even at that most people would, I think, be rather surprised to find that their average output per person is rather less than half in value of money than that of the Australian.

Malaysia \$320 a low figure by our standards, but a high figure by the standards of most, nearly three times the output of people of some of these other countries.

New Zealand, as might be expected, ranking very close to Australia, and in earlier years was ahead of us, \$1862, to our \$1967.

North Korea	\$80
North Vietnam	\$80
Pakistan	\$83
Philippines	\$160
Singapore	\$450
S. Korea	\$100
S. Vietnam	\$115
Formosa	\$225
Thailand	\$120

Now, if I were to occupy your time by giving you figures of population as well, and gross national product figures, you would find some very interesting points emerge. But I will just give you two illustrations from them. If you look at this table you will see that India has a population about 42 times that of Australia, but it has less than double the value of Australia's gross national product and on average output per person in money value approximately 1/20th that of Australia.

Indonesia, with more than nine times our population, has a gross national product only one-third that of Australia,

with an average output per person only 1/28th that of this country. Now this doesn't of course reflect the energy and the industry of people in the countries concerned. There are hard workers in every country, and I suppose there are some drones in every country. But it does reflect the degree of industrial development, technical skill, technological advance that one country is able to generate by comparison with another. And it is one of the reasons why Australia, with only 11½ million people, still counts as a factor, particularly in the economic life of the world. We rank amongst the first ten or twelve traders to be found around the world.

The countries of Asia, with the exception of Japan, have not yet truly reached the take-off point. But despite this, there are real grounds for hope, particularly if the area can be kept free of the senseless costs of war, and aid can be kept flowing into sound and self-generating projects. There is a transfer in resources from Australia for our own aid effort. It currently takes place in a number of ways, through contributions to the World Bank and other international bodies, through membership of the Asian Development Bank, through the Colombo Plan, and through bi-lateral programmes such as food aid for India.

A major effort from Australia necessarily is made in the territory of Papua/New Guinea, but our other international economic aid contributions are substantial. The annual rate now runs at well over one hundred million dollars, and we are moving fairly steadily towards what has been stated as a desired goal of one per cent of gross national product. At the moment it has moved up to I think 0.64 per cent and leaves us amongst the first four or five nations of the world in per capita terms in the grant of aid. But the size of our effort of course is limited by our own vast development needs. We have a continent the size of the United States to develop. Our reliance on a fairly substantial inflow of overseas capital, which accounts for about 10% of our total investment in fixed assets. And our need to greatly expand the defensive capacity of Australia, both for our own security and to assist in the joint security programmes aimed at producing stability in this area of the world.

In the trade field we have taken several steps specifically designed to create greater market opportunities for the products of the less developed countries and hence to encourage their economic development. Imports into Australia of a range of products of particular export interest to developing countries are liable to substantially lower rates of duty than are payable on corresponding products from developed countries. In addition we have removed, or are in process of removing, tariffs on a large range of handcraft products produced in developing countries as a means of assistance to the traditional industries to be found there. And, as our own industrial base grows, more capital and skills accumulate, not only for our national or personal benefit, but for the volume of international assistance we are able to give.

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## POLITICAL BACKGROUND

We have to recognize the facts of life in Asia and appreciate that were it not for the firm determination of the United States in South Vietnam and the role Britain played in Malaysia and is continuing to play in the area, the shape of Asia would be very different from that which exists today and the promise of the future would be very different from that we look forward to today. The generous commitment of these two countries has provided stability and a real measure of freedom. It has made it possible for many of the countries of Asia to participate in their own ways in the political, social and economic revolution so necessary for the well-being of their peoples and so important to us as their near neighbours.

ASPAC is one example of growing co-operation between the countries of Asia and we are proud to be included. There are signs of other forms of co-operation growing - the visits of political leaders, such gatherings as the Manila Conference. We certainly hope this process will continue and that the work of these organizations already established will strengthen.

Among the more encouraging of recent political developments I think the following deserve special mention:-

. Settlement of the long-standing dispute between Japan and Korea. These two countries have established normal relations and committed themselves to closer co-operation.

. The close relations now existing between Australia and Japan - two countries quite recently at war with each other. It is certainly a welcome change. Japan has become now the biggest purchaser of Australian exports. We rank second customer of the exports of Japan. We look to increasing and friendly links between our two fast-developing countries.

. Indonesia successfully overcame the Communist attempt to seize power. Its new government is concentrating on plans for economic recovery and development. From the figures I gave you a very difficult task lies ahead of them. Already there are attempts being made to give practical assistance from a considerable number of countries.

. Australia has established in recent years warm relationships with a number of these Asian countries. Even in the confrontation period we retained links of understanding with Indonesia.

. Cambodia is certainly not in the American camp, but we represent them in South Vietnam. We also represent the U.S. in Cambodia. It is quite an interesting development there and I give a lot of the credit to the French-speaking ambassador who has established very good relations with Prime Minister Sihanouk.

. We have developed important and friendly links with Thailand, more particularly over recent years and this again has a special interest for us as far as our nearest neighbour, Indonesia, is concerned, because there has been a long historic course of friendship between those two countries and when the confrontation negotiations were carried through,



it was, you may remember, in Bangkok that the parties met and in the friendly atmosphere provided by the people of the Thai administration, they were able to make very good progress.

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### STABILITY AS OUR GOAL

Our goal in Asia is one of stability. That is one of our principal goals at any rate. We don't mean by that something passive, conservative or resistant to change. That in itself carries the seeds of instability and indeed we have our own strong sense of national drive and independent spirit, and we've supported movements for national independence in South East Asia. But our concept of stability is a progressive one. We want in this region a constructive assured environment in which governments and administrations can plan and carry through with some certainty programmes and reforms based on the rational use of resources and conceived in the interests of the community as a whole; in which public authority is an instrumentality of the public welfare and is responsive to the needs of the community; and in which there is prospect of real participation on a broad basis in economic and social affairs.

Stability brings progress. In South East Asia it is the countries enjoying stability where conspicuously we find development occurring, rapid change and reform and a sense of national vitality and where the forces of modernisation are most apparent. Another point I should note with you is that nation-building on this constructive basis requires co-operation from other countries in the region and a stable external environment. A number of countries in South East Asia today are, in fact, reaching out towards regional co-operation as with ASPAC, the Manila Conference, Development Bank and in other ways and are truly entering into international arrangements for security and defence, economic assistance for educational and technical benefits. We in Australia feel a strong sense of common interest and mutuality of purpose in these matters. Despite the separateness of our histories and of our cultural and ethnic 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.

Now this was summed up well by the distinguished and able Foreign Minister of Thailand and he said that although Australia was not racially a part of Asia, it was considered as so because of the friendly interest she showed in the welfare of the people of Asia.

Again, President Marcos, at the Summit Conference at Manila had this to say about it: "The participation in this meeting of the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand is a hopeful augury. These two freedom-loving nations are our neighbours by the accident of geography but our friends and partners by deliberate choice. They are as fully

committed as ourselves to the freedom of Asia and to the attainment of the secure and just peace indispensable to the economic development of these combined nations. They have much to contribute to the attainment of our common goals."

And that I think demonstrates that Australia has been doing something of the job which your conference feels is the responsibility that lies ahead of us.

I conclude by speaking of the goals that were set out in one of the documents which emerged at the Manila Conference. It was called the Goals of Freedom. It said there, "We, the seven nations gathered in Manila, declare our unity, our resolve and our purpose in seeking together the goals of freedom in Vietnam and in the Asian and Pacific area." That document which I believe to be historic in its impact and its implications, recites that the goals are:

"To be free from aggression. To conquer hunger, illiteracy and disease. To build a region of security, order and progress. To seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific."

If we can live up to those goals, all of us, not only Australia but others in the region, then I believe we shall be doing our job.

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