

ASIAN TOUR 1967

DEPARTURE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD
HOLT FROM MASCOT AIRPORT, SYDNEY

28TH MARCH, 1967

Before departing on his tour of Asia, the Prime Minister made the following comments to the Press in response to questions :-

Q. What do you expect to come out of this trip, Sir?

PM: There are several valuable purposes, as I see them. First, this is an area of great strategic significance for Australia. We have been involved militarily at least four times in the last 25 years in this area, but my visit isn't primarily concerned with matters of security. I merely mention that because it reveals how important the area strategically is to Australia. Secondly, Australia is becoming increasingly involved in the trading possibilities in the area. Our trade with Japan, of course, has built up dramatically, and I think this is only a pointer to what we can expect to come in the years ahead, if we cultivate out opportunities skilfully and successfully.

Thirdly, quite obviously in this area, Australia has the possibility of making - and should be making - a diplomatic contribution. There are agencies now developing - ASPAC, the Asian Development Bank, such meetings as the Manila Conference, SEATO. some of them for security reasons, others for trade reasons, some for economic development. I want my visit to emphasise to the people in that area that Australia is conscious of its own increasing involvement in the problems and possibilities of the area, and I think it useful with all the reporting that you people are able to do on these matters so well for Australians to know how important and significant these countries have become for us.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, will you be discussing the Viet Nam war in all these places you are calling at?

PM: Oh, I wouldn't expect so. I haven't got any specific negotiations or treaty arrangements or conference proposals or anything of that sort. No, it is an opportunity to get to know better people and countries that are closely neighbouring to Australia and to have them get to know Australia better.

Q. Is it possible that our aid to these countries might be increased as a result of this visit?

PM: Well, our aid curve has been a rising one but I would not want to give any impression that I see any substantial enlargement of what we are already doing. Australia per capita ranks high among the aid-giving countries of the world.

Q. Will there be any chances for talks on Asian migrants for Australia?

PM: Well, you know, over recent years there has been a considerable liberalisation of our policy there. In the years since the Second World War, some 30,000 people have come into Australia who would not have been admissible under the policies that obtained earlier. More than 6,000 have been naturalised under revised arrangements in quite recent years. We have got the best part of 12,000 students from Asia in our universities and colleges. So there has been, I think, a sensible liberalisation of the arrangements which previously existed.

Q. Will there be further liberalisation?

PM: Well, I am not wanting to be specific on that. That is a matter of Government policy, which I wouldn't be in a position to develop here today.

Thank you.
