

CAMBODIA



TOAST PROPOSED BY PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK
AT GALA DINNER FOR THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. HAROLD HOLT, AT PHNOM PENH.

29th March, 1967.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome this evening the eminent Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Right Honourable Mr. Harold Holt, and those distinguished personages who accompany him. May I assure them of the warmth of the welcome that awaits them, and express the hope that they, for their part, will enjoy their brief stay amongst us.

I likewise assure you personally, Mr. Prime Minister, of the great significance we Cambodians attach to this, the first occasion on which the Head of an Australian Government has paid us an official visit, and of our appreciation of the opportunity thus afforded us of personal and friendly contacts between the members of our respective governments.

I would likewise stress that your presence here this evening constitutes proof that different political options and social conceptions do not represent an insuperable barrier to the establishment of cordial relations between governments and peoples, nor do they preclude the possibility of co-operation to mutual advantage on matters of common interest. Indeed, I would even make so bold as to claim that Khmer/Australian relations provide a world distracted by imperialist ambitions, and driven by national and economic rivalries with a shining example, not merely of peaceful but of fruitful and cordial co-existence. Moreover, the formula we have hit upon to produce such a state of affairs is a simple one, that of conforming in scrupulous fashion to the principle that all nations are equal, to that of give-and-take, coupled with a refusal to intervene in each other's internal affairs.

Another factor which has contributed to the establishment of these cordial relations has been the provision of aid in various forms, and of a most practical sort provided unconditionally by your government including consignments of motorpumps for irrigation purposes, material for our railways, and equipment for our capital, and for the recently founded sea port which bears my name.

We may be flattering ourselves unduly in regard to the assistance Australia has generously sent us in the light of a reward to the Khmer people for the untiring efforts they have been making ever since National Independence was recovered, to remedy Cambodia's formerly backward state and to equip it socially, economically and industrially with all the appurtenances of a modern nation.

There are good reasons for assuming, however, that the rapid progress Cambodia has been making in every field has not attracted the attention it merits, and that the belief is still prevalent in the outside world that our country is a stagnant backwater where as one Australian newspaper expressed it "last year no industrial development of any sort has taken place". We have been devoting much time and energy to dissipating this mistake by providing foreign peoples with an opportunity to come to their own conclusions in regard

to the progress achieved under the "Sangkum" regime in the course of the past eleven years.

One of the methods we adopted was the creation of a mobile exhibition of Cambodian achievements during the period in question, and of sending it abroad with a view to dissipating this mistaken impression of our country. Visitors to this exhibition in the many countries where it has opened its doors almost invariably exclaim "We had no idea Cambodia was so progressive, why it even boasts national industries and factories." This aspect of the progress Cambodia has made, Mr. Prime Minister, you will have an opportunity to verify in person.

It is our sole ambition, however, as it is our passionate desire to be allowed to complete the task to which we have set our hand, free of threats to our national independence. For, were the Khmer people to be robbed of their national independence, they would be deprived of their present incentive to pursue their efforts, and would relapse into that state of apathy which prevailed at the time of the French protectorate, a moral condition which gave rise to the legend that the Khmers were an idle and obtuse race, lacking the mental capacity to acquire scientific or technical knowledge of any sort or description.

If the erroneous nature of such an assumption has been demonstrated today, this should be ascribed to the impetus given by the recovery of national independence. But national independence perforce implies the absence of threats to territorial integrity. But certain great powers are presuming to call in question today the intangible nature of our present frontiers, oblivious of the fact that the "shoe is in fact on the other foot", as Cambodia possesses historic claims to territories at present being administered by neighbouring governments. We are, however, a sensible, pragmatic people, who have no desire to stir up the embers of past quarrels or forgotten wars. All we ask is to be allowed to live in peace within our present frontiers.

National independence likewise places us under an obligation to resist attempts from any quarter to reduce the status of our country to that of a satellite. This obligation, reinforced by our firm conviction that it must be respected, disproved the "thesis" propounded by those who seek to disparage our motives to the effect that our neutral policy is biased in favour of the "socialist camp" and implemented in such fashion as to cause the maximum of embarrassment to the "free" world.

But such an assumption is demolished by the very close and cordial nature of our relations with countries like Australia and France, the governments of which harbour no designs on the territories of their neighbours and conduct their foreign policy in conformity with those principles of reciprocal respect and some best calculated not only to safeguard national interests, but to ensure the prosperity and happiness of the peoples confided to their charge.

And it is with this assurance, and in this belief that I ask you, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, to join me in this toast : (a) to the health of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth Second, (b) to the health of His Excellency Mr. Harold Holt, Madame Holt, and those Australian friends of ours present here this evening, (c) to the prosperity of Australia, and to the happiness of its people (d) to the friendship to bind our two countries and peoples together.
