



ADDRESS BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR  
TRADE AND INDUSTRY MR. JOHN McEWEN, AT THE  
AUSTRALIAN CEREMONY FOR THE OPENING OF THE  
SOUTH-EAST ASIA COMMONWEALTH CABLE  
(SEACOM), SYDNEY, MARCH, 30TH,  
1967

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Thank you, Mr. Hulme. It is an honour to be here today at the making of telecommunications history.

I offer my sincere congratulations, and I am sure I can add the congratulations of the Australian people, to all who have made this possible.

We have today the culmination of a great co-operative enterprise.

Here is the end result of a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasm, foresight and vision, scientific and technical expertise, and organisational skills.

It is a wonderful thing to know that Australia has been a major partner in this, under the expert guidance of my colleague, Mr. Hulme.

I know that Australian enterprise has joined with the Government and made a very big contribution to this great project.

I am told that Australia has supplied more than half the materials used for the SEACOM cable as well as an appreciable amount of equipment for the cable stations.

Our manufacturing industries have supplied a substantial amount of the telecommunications equipment.

In these days it is easy to take for granted the miracles of modern technology.

I know from my own work in the Trade field the tremendous importance of good communications.

As Acting Prime Minister, and as the responsible Minister for Australia's international trade I suppose I am as big a customer as anyone for overseas communication services.

Communication services are an essential tool of my office.

It makes all the difference to have a service which is speedy, safe, reliable, and efficient!

BEGUN IN 1953

There is an interesting connection between today's ceremony and a conference which I attended at Montreal in 1958.

This was a Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference, attended by Ministerial delegations from all Commonwealth countries.

I was there as leader of the Australian delegation.

The Conference was reviewing the part the Commonwealth had played in fostering economic prosperity, both for Commonwealth members, and the world as a whole.

Against this background we were looking to see what more could be done towards these goals.

One of the more concrete proposals the Conference had before it was a recommendation of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board that an around-the-world coaxial telephone cable might eventually link all Commonwealth countries.

It had only recently become technically possible to provide such a cable.

There were still at that time many details to be worked out.

Both, technical problems, and financial questions, had to be resolved.

I recall with much satisfaction that this Conference of Commonwealth Ministers, in consultation with their Governments, decided there and then, that Commonwealth countries would join, to proceed with this visionary plan.

A way would be found to bring the concept to a reality.

One of the rewards of high Government office is to have a hand in great new plans, and see them come to fruition.

It is immensely satisfying to be here today at the opening of the Asian link of the Commonwealth Cable - a tangible result of a decision taken at that Conference where I spoke for Australia almost 9 years ago.

From that point my former colleague, Sir Charles Davidson, took up the running.

#### CLOSE TO ASIA

In the intervening years Australia has grown towards a closer and closer association in the Asian region.

Our traditional ties with Britain and Europe are strong. They have withstood the strain of geographic isolation for nearly 2 centuries.

Just as the shrinking of distances in the modern world is rapidly reducing our isolation from Europe, so it is bringing our near neighbours nearer.

Geography has put us close to Asia. The course of events both in Europe and Asia has sharpened our awareness of the fact.

Our trade and commerce with Asia have been growing steadily.

Today, a third of Australia's total exports go to Asian markets.

In 1958, when we first discussed the possibility of this cable, the figure was less than a quarter.

Trade and Commerce will be helped greatly by the faster and more effective communications which the SEACOM cable will provide.

We have long had close ties with our Commonwealth partners in Asia and the Pacific.

The Prime Minister has emphasized the importance that the Government attaches to Asian affairs in his statements and by his personal visits to Asian countries.

As you know, the Prime Minister is at present on a round of official visits, to some of the Asian countries which have special significance to Australia, and with which he has not previously had personal contact as Prime Minister.

#### AID TO OTHERS

In world affairs generally, Australia is playing a bigger role.

We recognise the gigantic problems faced by the developing countries.

We have shown ourselves willing to carry a growing responsibility internationally - helping the advancement of the less-developed countries of the world, and participating especially in the economic development of the Asian region.

For example, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is seeking ways of improving the trade earnings, and hence the income, of the less-developed countries.

In 1966, Australia led the world by granting concessions in the Australian tariff to products of these developing countries.

Australia has become a member of the Development Assistance Committee, a world "club" of major donor countries in international aid.

Our performance in official economic aid is recognized as high by any standard.

And it is constantly improving - in contrast to the performance of many other donor countries.

Currently we stand about 4th among all the nations of the world, in terms of the proportion of our national income which we devote to international aid.

My colleague, Mr. Hasluck, is at present overseas to attend a meeting of the United Nations' Economic Commission, for Asia and the Far East.

Australia's full and active membership of this organisation gives formal recognition of our place in Asian development.

We are participating fully in new Asian economic organisations such as the Asian Industrial Development Council, and the Asian Development Bank.

We know the important role that industrialization can and must play - as it has in our own country - in creating jobs, diversifying exports, and raising living standards.

We will shortly be exploring with Australian industry the ways and means by which Australia can help the Asian Industrial Development Council in its objective of fostering joint industrial undertakings in Asia.

WORLD CO-OPERATION

There are many forces at work in the world today - many facilities and organisations - bringing together the peoples of the world in closer co-operation.

In them, we play our due part, and even beyond.

It is often said that the greatest successes of the United Nations, have been achieved by its community activities in such fields as technical, scientific, and educational co-operation.

Some of the broader international efforts break down through the sheer weight of complexity and conflicting interests.

However, a lot can be achieved by more limited, but practical measures, towards specific objectives.

Technical training, training in trade promotion techniques, technical assistance with agriculture and industry, education and medical facilities.

These are some of the scores of fields in which there have been concrete and effective advances in international co-operation and assistance.

The International Telecommunications Union had its origins a little more than a century ago.

From its very beginnings, telecommunications broke new ground in international co-operation.

Certainly, nothing contributes more to mutual understanding and help between nations than the breaking down of physical barriers by modern advances in transport and communications.

NEW EXPERIENCE

Today we stand at the threshold of a new experience in communication.

One result will be that the lives of millions of people in Asia will become involved with our lives as never before.

We set our course to the future - to dedicate this new, technical, achievement to the goal of the betterment of all the people who live along its path.

For Australia this new development in communications comes at a time which is crucial for the future of our own country and our relationship with Asia.

I have mentioned various unfolding decisions of government directed towards our association with the countries of Asia, but in addition we have been adjusting to the political evolution of our neighbours in Asia.

We will press on with our policies, so that Australia may further a continuing vigorous and independent relationship with Asia.

We are, as it were, a bridge between 2 ancient cultures and ways of life - European and Asian.

From our shores will flow modern concepts of science and technology.

To us will come the enrichment of Asia's cultural and social aspirations.

We have our great achievement of today - this new telecommunications era.

Let us also direct ourselves today, and in all our tomorrows, in this region of Asia and the Pacific, to peace, friendship and plenty.