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THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 27 MARCH, 1973

PRIME MINISTER: Ladies and gentlemen, because it was anticipated that the statement on political terrorism would be made in the two Houses at the ordinary time at which I give this Press Conference on Tuesday I'd arranged with you to give the Press Conference at 3.30 p.m. There was a procedural change in the Senate and so I've therefore waited until the statement was concluded in the Senate before coming down here. Nevertheless, this will probably have to be fairly brief because I've made other engagements on the basis that I'd be seeing you all at 3.30 p.m. and I've put off everything as long as I can, but I have got other commitments.

There will be a few statements, some of them I think already given to you, about visits that I'll be making overseas. You probably know that I'll be visiting Apia for the South Pacific Forum - I think that's already been announced hasn't it - in the week before Easter - all the Commonwealth countries. Then over Easter, I'll be visiting England. There will be a press release given to you within the next few minutes. It might even come while we are still here. The essence of it - the chief points in it - are that I'm to stay at Windsor on Good Friday night. It's the Queen's birthday the following day, and I'm seeing Mr Heath on the Tuesday and there will be other appointments made in that week after Easter.

Then I mentioned to you earlier that I was hoping to be able to accept Mrs. Gandhi's invitation to visit India. We've pursued those arrangements and I'll be making the visit from the 4-7 June. There is a statement which Foreign Affairs has put in your boxes already. I think I mentioned to you previously that this is the first time that an Australian Prime Minister has visited India since 1959, so it's certainly long overdue. Perhaps I might add that it will be the seventh occasion that I have been there in that time.

I'd like to point out that in visiting Indonesia and now India, I'm not overlooking the ASEAN countries to which we continue to attach the greatest importance. Tun Dr. Ismail, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia has just made a very welcome visit to Australia and New Zealand. The Foreign Minister of Singapore and the Foreign Minister of the Philippines are also expected to visit Australia this year. I'm hoping to visit the ASEAN countries as soon as I can but, because of other arrangements of which you are already aware, it will be impossible to do so this year. Those are the things I wanted to mention: the South Pacific Forum, England and India.

Q.: When you go to Windsor, will you discuss the future Governor-Generalship?

PRIME MINISTER: I saw it as a suggestion but I wasn't expecting to.

Q.: Is it likely you will?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think so. I think any speculation on the Governor-Generalship is quite premature.

Q.: Will you be taking a short list with you?

PRIME MINISTER: No. But it's quite premature to discuss the question of the next Governor-General.

Q.: Would you as Prime Minister and leader of the country make a general comment on the statement that has just been made to Parliament by Senator Murphy and do you believe that there is a case to answer for the previous Government or Opposition, Sir. And in particular the Attorney-General, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: Certainly it's a case to answer as I'm sure you will have noticed from the statement, but I don't think since both Houses will be discussing this matter - I expect they'll be debating it not only today but possibly on other days - I don't want to duplicate what will be said in Parliament maybe by me among others.

Q.: When will legislation come in, Sir, to deal with ASIO - the reforming or re-organising?

PRIME MINISTER: There was no mention in the statement about legislation on ASIO.

Q.: No, but you said there would be changes in the legislation - in the law?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it was referring to legislation which in fact was recommended to the previous Government to give Commonwealth law enforcement agencies - the Police, for instance - authority to investigate crimes under Commonwealth legislation. As you realise, the Commonwealth Police can only investigate crimes under Commonwealth legislation, and there are some particular crimes for which the Commonwealth could legislate - and I expect there will be recommendations to Cabinet on this as there were to the former Government.

Q.: Was there any recommendation made today in Cabinet on this?

PRIME MINISTER: No.

Q.: Were there any Cabinet decisions or referrals today, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: The only matter discussed by Cabinet today was the statement that Senator Murphy has just made and which Mr Enderby will be making later.

Q.: Prime Minister, there has been a lot of speculation as to why the Attorney-General found it necessary to go to the ASIO headquarters in the fashion in which he did...?

PRIME MINISTER: Now I said I will not duplicate anything...

Q.: He made no mention of this, Sir. It was singularly absent from his speech...

PRIME MINISTER: I was asked questions about this in the House of Representatives today. There may easily be questions asked again on this matter. I don't propose to duplicate anything that can arise in the Parliament. This Press conference is not a substitute for the Parliament.

Q.: If I could ask you about something, Sir, which you yourself said last Wednesday when you spoke before Mr Bijedic, the Yugoslav Prime Minister, you spoke of the possibility of the reorganisation of the Australian Security and Intelligence Services.

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

Q.: Now did that mean ASIO, or did that mean what it literally said: that our security services and our intelligence services encompassing JIO and ASIS and other services?

PRIME MINISTER: I had in mind ASIO and the Commonwealth Police.

Q.: Sir, on quite a different subject...

PRIME MINISTER: By the way I was asked about OMEGA. Mr Jones has it in mind - we didn't reach it today - to recommend that we refer to the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence which I'm told by Mr Bowen, who has the conduct of the matter on behalf of the Opposition, will not be opposed by the Opposition. We have it in mind to recommend that that Committee should inquire into and report upon any Foreign Affairs or Defence aspects of OMEGA.

Q.: That Committee is not formed yet?

PRIME MINISTER: No. But it will probably come up tomorrow - tomorrow night. Mr Bowen asked that it come on tomorrow night. We've agreed. I asked whether he would be opposing it. He said he wouldn't.

Q.: Mr Whitlam, has your Party chosen its membership?

PRIME MINISTER: No. But we probably will tomorrow knowing that it will not be opposed.

Q.: Sir, on another subject, in one of his more recent statements on Foreign Affairs, Dr Cairns, the Minister for Overseas Trade and Secondary Industry said that Australia would be represented in any fleet of ships which sailed into the French testing zone, and that he felt Australia should supply a tanker for such a fleet of ships. As Minister for Foreign Affairs, do you think Australia will be represented, or should send a tanker?

PRIME MINISTER: I've not decided. The Government hasn't decided. I don't propose to make any statements on contingencies until after we know the result of the negotiations - the ministerial discussions which will take place in Paris just before or just after Easter, and contingent on those discussions, proceedings in the Court.

Q.: Although the next set of tests might well have taken place before the...?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't believe they will.

Q.: Mr Prime Minister, as you are going to Britain at Easter time, it won't be very hard to fly across to Paris. Will you do so?

PRIME MINISTER: I'd love to, but I don't think I can.... I don't think it's likely.

Q.: Well the French Government is quite anxious to welcome you, Sir.

PRIME MINISTER: That's very nice.

Q.: We got the cable this morning, Sir.

Q.: Sir, on the question of the tests, are we to understand that the Government's not planning any direct action other than discussions and the I.C.J. case?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not going to say anything more on this subject. I do this on a full consideration of the legal implications of anything that I say on occasions like this. I can assure you I will not be making any comment on this subject until after we know the result of the discussions in Paris or proceedings in the Court.

Q.: Will you be going to Washington in the near future, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll be in North America in August. It's very likely I'll be going to Washington and/or New York.

Q.: Would you be visiting the President in Washington, Sir? Do you have an invitation there?

PRIME MINISTER: Well one would expect one would, but there have been no arrangements - no approaches.
