



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION

201
CLEMENCEAU
AVENUE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 9.00 PM 7 FEBRUARY

7 February 1974

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P., AT A STATE DINNER GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE, MR LEE KUAN YEW, SINGAPORE, THURSDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 1974.

Each time one comes to Singapore, one is reminded of its economic progress and vitality.

I can think of few countries in which one of the major problems of the developing world - namely sustaining the momentum of economic growth - has been so firmly - and successfully - met.

This is a nation which has carried out an industrial revolution and an urban revolution of tremendous import and importance to this region.

I wish to assure you tonight, Mr Prime Minister, of Australia's strong and continuing interest in maintaining a substantial and enduring relationship with Singapore, and indeed with all the countries of South-East Asia.

I would like to stress that what has changed since my Government came to office is not the degree of Australian interest in South-East Asia but the nature and direction of that interest. As I have often said during my present tour, the emphasis of our growing interest will be less influenced by ideological considerations but more by a constructive approach, more permanent, more enduring, co-operation through trade, investment, aid, cultural and other contacts. Defence co-operation continues, but other forms of co-operation grow.

Behind the change the Australian Government has made lies partly the political changes occurring within several countries of the region - changes of Government in Australia and New Zealand, profound constitutional changes in Thailand, Burma and the Philippines, and the virtual creation of a new independent nation in Papua New Guinea.

It's worth recalling these matters, not least for the benefit of Australians, because there is a tendency in Australia to think that Australia has been the only country in the region where there has been change. Yet important as these internal political changes are, and significant as the changes in external policies resulting from domestic change are, they are only part of rapid and dramatic changes taking place in the wider region in the relations between the great powers.

Super-imposed on all these changes, re-inforcing them, complicating them and where the changes are beneficial threatening them, is the energy crisis. The political changes in countries like Australia may look small beer indeed in the face of such tremendous events.

The great thing however is that these events re-inforce the idea of the mutual interdependence, of all nations - not least of Singapore and Australia. We are the two great traders of the neighbourhood - our very life depends upon it. We are among the two most highly urbanised countries on earth; we are both essentially nations of city-dwellers. We are both technological nations, our people and our economies relying not only on our skills, but on our getting access to the physical means for applying those skills. Perhaps more than any nations in the region, we both depend upon our ability to develop effectively the skills of our peoples. And our prosperity depends on the prosperity of others. The same developments in Japan, in Britain and Europe, in the United States, which might damage Singapore would certainly and simultaneously damage Australia. When we consider the inter-relationship of national economies, the inter-dependence of the world economy, it is hardly possible to conceive a prosperous Australia without a prosperous Singapore.

So there was never a time when our mutual interests and concerns have been closer.

Sure, Australia's perception of Singapore has changed; it has widened and broadened.

True, there was a time when Singapore was Asia in Australian minds, to the extent that we thought much about Asia at all, except in terms of vague menace. And the perception of Singapore was of British Singapore, not of Asian Singapore. In 1974 I can say emphatically that Australia's deep and continuing interest in Singapore, its welfare, its progress, its role in the region, is a genuine Australian perception of Singapore as a dynamic, pace-setting Asian nation.

Mr Prime Minister - there is no head of Government with whom I have had a longer, closer association. You extended friendship to me in days when the party and its leadership were discounted; and you know from your own experience that friendship and attention extended in days of adversity and apparent hopelessness is the most worth having, because the most sincere. I have always deeply valued our association. I value it all the more now that that association can so significantly affect the basic well-being of the peoples of our two countries.

Our countries have so much in common. Naturally, where the circumstances of our two nations are different, there will be different perceptions. At Ottawa last year, some of these differences were ventilated - that was indeed an illustration of the value we place on the Commonwealth forum where frankness in exchange of views and ideas provides one of its main advantages and strengths. I hope, I believe that one day the states of Asia and the Pacific will be able to set up a similar sort of forum where leaders can meet not in an atmosphere of fear or crisis or of expectation of aid, but to exchange views and remove misunderstandings before they develop further.

I am visiting your country and other South-East Asian states to demonstrate Australia's continuing - more than continuing, our growing and deepening - interest in developing close and friendly ties with our neighbours.

I hope to place Australia firmly, confidently, co-operatively in the context of our Asian future.

If we have bilateral problems let us sort these out in a spirit of goodwill; if we have different perceptions of world developments, let us seek to pool our ideas. Our two countries have a long history of past and friendly co-operation; it is still very much Australian policy to foster and develop this further.

And they are being developed to our mutual advantage. We Australians do wish to move away from the idea that our relations are limited to a defence relationship - important as that aspect of our co-operation is, and will continue to be. It is not just a matter of bilateral relations at the Government level. There is strengthening and widening of relations between our peoples - Australian tourists, Singapore students, Australian business, Singapore markets, in civil aviation, in communications, in professional interchange - over a whole range of matters which are important to the people, not just the politicians. This exchange and interchange - on-going and expanding - is the real basis of the developing friendships between our peoples.
