



NEWS RELEASE

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PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS AT STATE DINNER,
KUALA LUMPUR

The following is an amended text of an address given by the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, at a State dinner in his honour in Kuala Lumpur on 29 January 1974. This text should replace that issued in our news release number M/9 of 29 January 1974:

"It is thoroughly appropriate that I should have begun my visit to six countries in the South-East Asian region here, in Malaysia.

I am no stranger to your country.

I come as an old friend as the guest of old friends.

I come as Prime Minister of a nation with a long and proven friendship towards the people of Malaysia.

I come to re-affirm that friendship and to seek new ways to strengthen the cooperation which has existed between our two countries for more than two decades.

There is no country in the region which better exemplifies the spirit of national independence and regional cooperation than your own.

I believe further there is no country in the region where the policies of my own government are better understood and where the responses and attitudes of our two governments to the changes, challenges and opportunities in the region are more in harmony.

In this climate of change, in seeking new solutions to new problems, Malaysia has responded with vigour and imagination.

We Australians have in our own way tried to do the same.

Our views at so many points coincide, and so do the interest of our two nations.

In particular, we march in step on three fundamental matters.

We both believe that the detente between the great powers can work, that it must be made to work and that the smaller powers like Malaysia and Australia can help to make it work.

We both believe deeply that this region should not become the area for confrontation and competition between the great powers.

We both believe that regional cooperation and regional associations have a vital contribution to make to the stability and prosperity of this region.

It is against this background of shared interests, shared attitudes and shared aspirations that I wish the policies and actions of the Australian Government to be seen.

In Australia, we have broadened the range of our international contacts.

We have sought to break down ideological constraints which had for so long obstructed meaningful relationships with countries such as China, East Germany and North Viet-Nam.

We have placed our relationships with the United States and the United Kingdom on the basis of a more mature partnership.

We have widened our horizons and sought great cooperation with the medium and smaller powers of Africa, Latin America and the Pacific.

We have given our full support to all questions of human rights and declared our opposition to any forms of lingering colonialism.

We have sought to remove any taint of racism from our national and international policies.

I wish to make it quite clear that our interest in South East Asia continues undiminished.

Our genuine concern about the well-being of Malaysia and our other neighbours in the region is a central and enduring feature of Australian foreign policy.

What has changed in our attitude to South East Asia is not the degree of our interest or of our involvement, but the nature of that interest and that involvement.

We seek to turn away from the destructive confrontations of the past to constructive cooperation in the future.

In the context of our common view, it's worthwhile recalling that some of my Government's earliest decisions brought us even more in line with the policy of the Malaysian government.

After coming to office, we ended our military role in Viet-Nam - a role which Malaysia did not undertake.

We ended our military assistance previously given to Cambodia - Malaysia had never given such military assistance.

We reduced our involvement with ASPAC - an organisation in which Malaysia no longer participates, and we sought - successfully - to change the military emphasis of SEATO - an organisation of which Malaysia was never a member.

My Government has set a new course for Australia in this region.

We have shifted the emphasis of our continuing involvement in South East Asia from one primarily based on ideological considerations and military alliances to one based increasingly on developing trade with the countries of the region, on promoting progress through constructive aid programs, on encouraging security through regional cooperation, on a positive response to the recent proposals that we should consider financial assistance to agreed ASEAN projects, and on the development of cultural contacts through the negotiation of cultural agreements with the countries of South East Asia.

We see in this re-orientation of our diplomatic efforts the opportunity, which has been too often missed or ignored in the past, to establish enduring relationships with the countries of this region.

It is not our wish to forge ties based on transitory concerns but to seek out ways of developing bonds based on an identification of those interests which will continue irrespective of the governments in power in Australia or the region.

Our main endeavours will henceforth be directed towards expanding relations in those fields most likely to produce lasting social and economic advantages for both us and our neighbours.

Some manifestations of this change are already evident.

In recent months we have joined MEDSEA, The Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of South East Asia.

Only yesterday in Bangkok we were proclaimed an associate member of SEAMEO, The South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation.

Earlier this month we met for the first time with the Secretaries-General of ASEAN to discuss ways in which Australia might assist ASEAN projects.

I stress that isolationism is not a policy option for Australia.

We are going through a period of change and adjustment which I believe will result in more fruitful Australian involvement than ever before with the countries of South East Asia.

In this re-orientation I would stress that we have not sought to widen our interests and contacts at the expense of older friendships.

And this applies with special force to Malaysia and the ASEAN nations.

For too long our interests in this region were seen excessively in terms of defence.

We do not now look on the countries of South East Asia as buffer states or as constituting some northern military line where some potential future enemy of Australia should be held.

Rather, we see these countries, especially Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, as countries which have a common interest with Australia and New Zealand in consolidating the security and stability of this region as a whole.

In particular we seek close relations with the Commonwealth nations in South East Asia and the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas.

Australia's own defence capability is enhanced by mutual defence arrangements.

My Government gave a pledge to the Australian people to honour the full terms of the Five Power Arrangements until a more positive and enduring settlement is reached in establishing peace, freedom and neutrality in this region.

Australian Air Force Squadrons will remain at Butterworth as long as they remain relevant to the needs of both our nations and relevant to the realities of the region.

This is a matter which, in consultation with your government, we shall review as appropriate.

Our defence association is only on aspect of the relations between our two nations and our two peoples.

We have our longstanding common bond through our membership of the Commonwealth.

We have increasingly fruitful cooperation at the United Nations and the Australian Government now, as a matter of policy, consults closely with the countries of South East Asia before determining our position at the United Nations.

A glance at our voting patterns in the United Nations will show that since December 1972 we have voted together to a much greater extent than ever before.

We have at present over 6,000 Malaysian students in Australia, many of whom have enriched our culture and widened our perspectives.

Others who have returned occupy prominent positions in your Government and Public Service.

This exchange can only strengthen the understanding of a friendship for each country in the other.

Trade and Australian investment in Malaysia have developed rapidly.

Only a week ago I announced a new Australian policy on Australian investment overseas, especially in developing countries.

We want to encourage private Australian investment on a joint venture basis in Malaysia in a way which will benefit the people of Malaysia and will be favourable to the ownership and control of enterprises by Malaysians.

We understand and accept the wish of developing countries to regulate foreign investment in accordance with their own national aspirations and development plans.

We seek no less for ourselves and we see Australian investment overseas in the context of mutual benefit and of economic cooperation without exploitation.

Recently the number of Australian tourists visiting Malaysia has increased greatly.

There has also been a rapid growth in the cultural exchanges between our two countries.

This is a matter which I believe worthy of further active encouragement.

I believe that these programs of exchange between peoples and cultures have an increasingly greater part to play in developing a wider, enduring understanding between peoples and cultures have an increasingly greater part to play in developing a wider, enduring understanding between neighbours with different cultural backgrounds.

Let us freely acknowledge the differences in culture, but let us learn more about each other and from each other.

All these links have contributed to a high level of awareness and understanding of each other.

We, in Australia, have been impressed by the economic success of Malaysia.

I note that in your recent mid-term review of the second Malaysia plan you have not only achieved, but have exceeded, your growth target.

The importance of economic success is absolute because only with economic progress will there be social advancement and regional stability.

I do not, however, wish to comment only on Malaysia's contribution to the economic development of the region.

If anything in the past few years we have watched with even greater admiration the way Malaysia has evolved her foreign policies to match the changed realities of the area.

Malaysia has, along with Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, established a workable, relevant and important regional grouping - ASEAN.

ASEAN is an example to all of us of the co-operation and understanding which can be achieved if countries with a common interest in progress come together to promote that common interest.

Malaysia has also used that forum to advance its concept of a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality.

Australia applauds this initiative and welcomes the objectives which the ASEAN countries have set for themselves for a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in South East Asia.

It is a creative concept which, if fulfilled, will not only benefit the nations in the zone, it will itself be a further step towards detente, if the great powers are able to agree not to use this region as the field for destructive rivalry.

You have acknowledged that the zone of peace, freedom and neutrality will not be achieved overnight.

It is evident that the great powers will need to show more trust towards each other before they will come to a point when they can agree mutually to accept the zone.

The search for detente has begun and I believe the realisation will grow that it is only the imaginative farsightedness of such new initiatives which will enable our world to attain the peace and justice we all desire.

In the same spirit of hope but with the same awareness of the difficulties in the way, my Government has suggested that some wider regional arrangement for information consultation between the nations of the whole region should be established in the future.

We consider that it is important that the countries of the Asian and Pacific region should be able to come together to discuss common interests in an atmosphere free of crisis, free of pomp, free of drama, and free of excessive expectations of any spectacular results.

I recognise that such a forum cannot be achieved quickly, it has to evolve from within the region, out of the wishes of the countries of the region.

Like the zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, it will only come about when the countries concerned agree that it is in their mutual interests to have such a forum.

Lest there be any misunderstandings, I want to emphasise that we do not see such an association competing with ASEAN in any way.

On the contrary, we would see it as being complementary to ASEAN which has proved itself to be a close, viable and natural grouping of South East Asian states.

Malaysia and Australia are both moving in the same general direction and, with the benefit of our long-standing friendship and understanding, we should, by working together, make our goals that much more capable of achievement.

We share the same great goals.

We are marching together towards them.

In some matters, such as normalisation of relations with China, Australia has been able to move more quickly than Malaysia.

In others, such as the establishment of relations with North Korea, Malaysia has moved more quickly than Australia.

This has been because of differences in our circumstances rather than differences in our ultimate goals.

We are each involved in our own way in an important humanitarian experiment.

You, within Malaysia, are trying to forge a free, prosperous and harmonious multi-racial society.

We, in Australia, notwithstanding our European origins, are trying to build strong bridges and develop lasting links with Malaysia and the countries of South East Asia.

But we both seek, I believe, the same end, namely to cooperate closely, as good neighbours should, in a wider effort to promote a stable, more prosperous and peaceful multi-racial South East Asian region.

When one sees the severity of the test which the detente much undergo, as shown so suddenly and dangerously in the Middle East when one sees the continuing frustration of our high hopes just one year ago for real peace in Indo-China, it would be an exceptionally bold or excessively naive man who declares his unqualified optimism about the course of events and their outcome.

Yet, fundamentally, I am an optimist, certainly about the future of our region.

Diplomacy must be based on realistic hopes rather than on resignation and despair.

And from no country in the region, from the effectiveness of its Government, the growing prosperity of its people, and the imaginative policies of its leaders, do I draw more encouragement sustain that optimism and that hope than I do from Malaysia.