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AUSTRALIA AND ASIA : THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION

The following is the text of a speech by the Prime Minister, The Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., to the Asian Seminar during the Centenary Celebrations of the University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Tuesday 5 March, 1974:

"There is something profoundly satisfying, and essentially contemporary in spirit, in the decision to hold an Asian Seminar in conjunction with the centenary of this great University. I can think of no more fitting demonstration of the reality of your involvement, and Australia's involvement, in the welfare of the countries of our region.

The origins of this University, like those of this State, are of course rooted deeply in European culture and, more particularly, in the customs and traditions of the great English foundations of scholarship and learning. For that reason, your emphasis on Asian education and culture, and Australia's links with Asia, is striking proof of a modern and progressive interest in our neighbours. For myself it is especially gratifying that your seminar reflects two deep personal commitments of my own: my commitment to education and my commitment to the progress and development of our region.

During my recent visit to South-East Asia my aim was to advance Australia's national interests in a region of continuing and increasing importance to this country. I believe I succeeded. I believe the confluence of history and geography - our mainly European origins and our location on the edge of South-East Asia - affords us a unique opportunity to demonstrate that countries with quite different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds can evolve intimate and lasting relationships. We have moved closer to Asia; we are involved in Asia

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as never before. And we are particularly involved in the education of Asian people. We provide funds for the expansion of the teaching of Asian languages and cultures in Australia. We provide travel grants to enable Australian teachers to visit Asia. A month ago my colleague the Minister for Education went to Bangkok to accept, on behalf of Australia, an invitation to join SEAMEC, the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Conference.

Naturally our interest in the region extends beyond cultural and educational matters, important as these are. We give substantial economic aid to Asian development. I have therefore chosen this occasion to announce that the Australian Government will contribute \$18,150,000 to the Asian Development Fund. As many of you know, the Fund has been established within the Asian Development Bank, and my colleague the Treasurer, in his capacity as Governor of the Bank, was among those who supported the creation of the Development Fund. Historians will note, I trust, that Australia is one of the first countries to announce its contribution. The beneficiaries of the Fund will be the poorer developing member countries of the Asian and Pacific region. There are many who suggest that the chief emphasis of my Government has been to promote a "new nationalism" in Australia. It would, I think, be better and more accurate to describe our policy as a new internationalism.

My principal purpose this morning is to tell you something of Australia's contribution to Asian education, particularly through the Colombo Plan. In this room today there is living, brilliant evidence of the success of that Plan and of the contribution this university has made to its ideals and objectives. I note, among the other participants of your seminar, the Honourable Datuk Taib, Minister of Primary Industries in Malaysia, a distinguished member of the South Australian bar and a graduate of this university. I welcome Mr W.R. Crocker, Lieutenant-Governor of South Australia, a former Australian diplomat of great eminence and, again, a graduate of Adelaide University. I pay tribute to Sir Percy Spender, former President of the International Court of Justice, who, as a Minister of the Australian Government, did much to develop and encourage the Colombo Plan in its early years.

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Indeed, looking at your list of speakers and chairman - both Asians and Australians - I cannot recall a more distinguished and representative assembly of men whose whole lives and careers have been devoted to the cultural and educational advancement of the Asian people. I welcome you all, and wish your seminar the utmost success.

The Australian Government attaches great importance to its overseas aid activities. We regard the technical assistance and training elements of that aid as most significant. We are now establishing a new organisation, the Development Assistance Agency, to administer all our aid programs, whether bilateral or multilateral. We want to ensure that an innovative and imaginative approach is adopted to foreign aid and to see that our aid programs are quickly and effectively put into action. Our objective is not only to increase the volume of Australian aid, but to improve the quality of the assistance we are able to provide; to ensure that it has a more direct bearing upon improving the quality of life in developing countries.

Put simply, our aid is oriented to the needs of fellow human beings. The training and education elements of aid programs are the most direct means by which we can attain this orientation. By building upon human skills and knowledge, we help to develop the one essential, self-regenerating resource upon which social and economic progress ultimately depends. Training and education programs have properly been in the forefront since our official overseas aid programs began in 1951 with the commencement of the Colombo Plan.

Australian assistance to education under the Colombo Plan has been directed over the years into a range of activities designed to meet various needs of the recipient countries. At present our assistance covers training in Australian universities, Government departments, educational institutions and industry; the sending of experts and advisers to the developing countries to assist in research, training and development; and the provision of equipment for educational institutions in the developing countries themselves.

The number of awards financed each year under Australian Government aid schemes for training and education in Australia has

grown impressively; from 450 in 1955 to 3,345 in 1973. In money terms, annual expenditure on education and training under the Colombo Plan has increased in the last five years from \$3.7 million to \$6.4 million. To this should be added substantial sums for assisting educational institutions abroad. These figures can be expected to grow, in keeping with the general growth of our aid programs. You will recall that the Government last year accepted the United Nations target to raise its official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of GNP by the end of the decade.

Perhaps I should point out that the Colombo Plan techniques of providing training and technical assistance now extend beyond the Colombo Plan area being covered by various programs of assistance to countries in Africa and the South Pacific, including Papua New Guinea. My comments today can be generally taken to include these other programs.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA

Overseas students have made up a significant percentage of full-time enrolments in Australian universities. In 1972 3492 overseas students from Asian, African and Pacific countries were enrolled at universities. This represented 4.2 per cent of a total full-time enrolment of 83,600. Australian Government-sponsored overseas students enrolled at universities totalled 1,383 or 1.7 per cent of the full-time university enrolment.

Each year recipient Governments are invited to nominate students for training in Australia. Levels and fields of study are determined by the governments of the recipient country depending upon their own varying national needs. The only limitations imposed by the Australian Government are concerned with the relevance of the proposed training to the economic development of the nominating country, the availability of the proposed training in the nominating country, the adequacy of the qualifications of the nominee to undertake the proposed training and the capacity of Australian institutions to provide it. Members of the Colombo Plan have agreed among themselves that training at technician level and below should be provided only for highly specialised instruction for which adequate facilities are unavailable within their own or neighbouring countries.

Malaysia has been the largest recipient of Australian Colombo Plan scholarships and fellowships, with some 2,300 awards up to the end of last year. Then follows Indonesia, also with over 2,000 awards; India 1,300 and Thailand 1,200. Numbers however do not tell the whole story, and the impact of Australian studies may be relatively greater in some of the smaller recipient countries than in the larger ones. The 56 Australian-trained students in the Maldives Islands, or the 30 Bhutanese, contribute significantly to the pool of skills available in those countries, whereas our much greater contribution to a country like India must remain largely unseen. In all, over 13,000 Colombo Plan students and trainees have trained in Australia since the commencement of the Colombo Plan.

Scholarships and fellowships have been provided for secondary and undergraduate courses, post-graduate studies and for academic work in research institutions. In the early days of the Colombo Plan a high percentage of awards was taken up for these formal courses. One interesting development, reflecting the changing needs and priorities of the developing countries, is the current trend towards short intensive courses outside the formal educational institutions.

In 1972/73, the universities and technical colleges accounted for only 31 per cent of the new intake of sponsored students with 69 per cent undertaking non-formal types of training. This was almost the exact opposite of the respective percentages applying only five years earlier. I expect that this trend will continue as the educational institutions within the developing countries become more and more able to cope with their own needs, particularly at the undergraduate and secondary schools level.

The practical courses of training to which I have just referred are designed to meet the needs of individual students and groups of students, and consequently follow varied patterns. Training may consist of practical attachments in Government departments and industry; international training courses in a wide range of fields, mainly concerned with agriculture and food production, administration and management, and professional and scientific subjects; courses in the English language; and awards

to train people to manage and control projects being set up in their homelands by Australia. Another means of help has been assistance to Australian universities to establish courses especially designed to meet the needs of the developing countries, such as the Agricultural Development Economics course at the Australian National University.

Australian academics and universities have themselves made a direct and valuable contribution to Australia's role in international education, not only through their contributions to the formulation of Aid policies, but also by direct participation in the business of aid. The Australian-Asian Universities Co-operation Scheme, administered through the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, provides for a direct association between Australian universities and universities in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. To avoid the dissipation of resources the area of activities has initially been confined to disciplines related to agriculture and food production, with the future intention of extending into population studies. The Scheme is financed from our aid funds.

I should now like to mention Australian assistance to educational institutions in developing countries themselves, a somewhat less well known feature of Australian aid than the training provided in Australia.

Under the Colombo Plan we have already provided experts and equipment to a number of countries. For instance, in Indonesia, Australia is providing advice to the Ministry of Education and Culture on the planning of vocational training programs and the training of technical teachers and administrators. Experts have been sent to the Jogjakarta Vocational Training Institute to advise on curriculum and teacher training.

In Singapore, we are providing equipment and advice for instruction and curriculum planning at the Jurong Vocational Institute, and lecturers and examiners for medical degree examinations at the University of Singapore. In Malaysia, Australia has recently equipped a number of woodwork schools.

In Thailand, we have provided lecturers for the Language Institute, the North Bangkok Engineering School, and equipment for the Mahidol University and the Bangkok Technical Institute.

In Korea, we have been assisting with instructors and equipment at a major Technical School for a number of years, at a cost of over half a million dollars. In Laos, we have provided supplies for primary schools and are building a Forestry School, as well as providing instructors for the Vientiane Teachers' Training College.

I consider initiatives such as these serve a good purpose and, as I shall mention later, this is an area to which we should divert increasing attention.

Another area for development is that of "third country" awards, whereby Australia provides fellowships for students from a developing country to study in another country in the Colombo Plan region. Until recently, the number of awards of this type was very small, but such training offers distinct advantages. We should encourage it wherever appropriate. I have in mind educational institutions such as the Regional English Language Centre in Singapore, the Civil Aviation Training Centre, the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok and the International Rice Research Institute in Manila.

I know the overriding question in many minds is whether our aid programs are working. Various studies of the results of our educational programs have been made. These have not been co-ordinated, nor are they by any means comprehensive; but they have contributed to our knowledge and appreciation of the problems involved. I have in mind the studies made by various research scholars on the utilisation of Australian skills within the countries of South and South-East Asia; the effects of their Australian experience upon students' attitudes to their homelands, their employment on their return and the problems of communication experienced by the foreign student abroad.

Within the Government the Department of Foreign Affairs has conducted for many years a follow-up evaluation covering returned students. On the initiative of Australia, the Colombo Plan Council for Technical Co-operation has now adopted a standard form of evaluation questionnaire directed to the recipient governments, to obtain their assessment of the results of training abroad. The Departments of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and

Education have also been collaborating for the last two years with the Australian National University in a study undertaken as a part of a worldwide examination by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) of the effects of study abroad upon the attitudes of foreign students, in relation to the problem of the so-called "brain drain".

These studies are a necessary part of the process of review and assessment. Inevitably, the 23 years of Colombo Plan activity are not an unrelieved history of success. Aspects of the programs have come in for criticism and it would be surprising if this were not so. Looking at our total educational assistance, both through the Colombo Plan and to private students, I have been concerned to see an ethnic and economic imbalance. Our educational aid has gone overwhelmingly to people of the Chinese race. Much as I respect and admire such people, we have tended to help those whose economic circumstances in many cases would have allowed them to help themselves. A poor student is unlikely to be able to take advantage of our educational opportunities no matter how brilliant scholastically unless he succeeds in gaining his own Government's nomination for a Colombo Plan Scholarship. At the same time we have been reluctant to apply a means test to the citizens of other countries seeking to enter Australia for education, nor to apply other discriminatory measures.

In considering how best to ensure that benefits are more equally open to other ethnic groups and to those in greatest need, I believe we should be providing greater assistance than at present for the development of educational institutions in the developing countries themselves. I recognise that there are difficulties. The supply of teachers and lecturers able to undertake assignments abroad is not unlimited. The demands for staff arising from the Government's educational policies within Australia cannot yet be fully assessed. There are problems in the adaptation of Australian teachers and lecturers to the curricula and methods of other educational systems, to an alien cultural background, and often to a foreign language. However these are problems which I believe can be overcome with effective planning. I would see such expanded progress abroad as complementing continuing programs in Australia.

I also see value in extending the present system of Third Country fellowships for regional education and training institutions. We can provide training teams to conduct short courses within the developing countries in fields of study where this type of assistance can be effectively introduced. We will expand joint training courses already offered in collaboration with the Government of New Zealand and will investigate the possibilities of joint arrangements for training abroad with international organisations such as the World Bank.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Aid drew attention to the need to direct our assistance away from the heavy preponderance of private students pursuing undergraduate studies in Australia. As I have explained earlier, this readjustment has already occurred in the Colombo Plan. Within an officially sponsored aid program, worked out between Governments, the level of studies can be readily adjusted to the specific needs of each country, at its particular stage of development.

It is far more difficult, however, to influence the aspirations of private citizens in other countries whose sights are set upon an academic career. As I found during my visit to Thailand, the tradition of study abroad is well established. The Thai Government and individual citizens attach great importance to the opportunities we have offered to their young students and we must take due account of their views.

I turn now to the question of the return of students to their homeland after their studies. The objectives of our sponsored programs - the transfer of knowledge and training to the developing countries - would be defeated if the skills acquired abroad were not taken home by the student. This has been a matter to which Australia and its Colombo Plan partners have always attached considerable importance. Indeed it was on the Australian initiative that it was made the subject of special study by the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee in 1972. To limit a "brain drain", the Colombo Plan Council for Technical Co-operation, which represents all donor and all recipient governments, requires that every trainee under the Colombo Plan shall return home on the completion of his training. In addition, most home governments impose a money bond or a bond of service on their trainees to encourage their return or compensate

for the loss of their skills. This is a contract between the recipient government and its own citizens in which the donor government is not directly involved.

The same general arrangements apply in Australia to trainees under other schemes for sponsored training, which extend the Colombo Plan principle to other areas of the world.

Given these arrangements the return of sponsored students has not proved to be a problem. Less than 2 per cent of the total number of sponsored students remain in Australia, in most instances because of the thoroughly laudable reason that they have married Australians.

Private students are in a different position. There are at the moment approximately 10,000 private overseas students in Australia and there have been about 40,000 in the period since 1950. They are quite distinct from sponsored students. They have no official backing from their own governments; they are enrolled by direct personal application to Australian institutions; they provide their own financial resources to travel to Australia and to maintain and educate themselves. Nevertheless, government subsidies to educational institutions in respect of places occupied by private overseas students amounted to about \$9.5 million in 1972. My Government's abolition of tertiary fees will considerably increase indirect assistance to private students of this kind.

Private students have been coming to Australia since the beginning of the century. The first arrangements for student entry were made in 1904. Over the years many thousands of private Asian students have studied in Australia and returned home to help in the development of their countries.

Until 1973 the private overseas students program was considered an adjunct to aid to developing countries. My Government's objectives in reviewing the admission of private students has been to place emphasis on good relations and cultural exchange. Under our new policy private students continue to enter Australia on a temporary basis; but if successful private students wish to remain in Australia and can meet the normal migration criteria, the Australian Government will no longer compel them to depart. As in the past, I expect that most private students will continue to see

their future in their own homelands. We have been inclined to exaggerate the attractions of Australia to the young people of other countries. The ties of family and friends, their obligations to their fellow countrymen and their own natural attachment to the land of their birth will draw most of the students home when their studies are completed. Some will wish to remain, including some whose skills are also needed in their own countries.

In my recent Asian tour some countries, notably Singapore, expressed concern at the contributory effect this policy would have on the "brain drain" and the loss of skilled personnel. I consider the onus most properly lie on the home country to impose the limitations and barriers or conditions that it considers necessary. It must also bear the odium or responsibility of requiring its students to return. I have agreed with the Prime Minister of Singapore that in future all Singapore private students should be officially sponsored by the Government of Singapore to ensure their return to Singapore at the conclusion of their studies. There could be cases where humanitarian considerations might require a departure from this principle. Mr Lee agreed that this could be so.

In looking at the results achieved by the Colombo Plan in the educational area, we have to remember that we are not dealing only with statistics but with human beings. Not that the statistics are unimpressive. More than 13,000 sponsored students have passed through the scheme up to the end of 1973. Sponsored overseas students' results at the annual examinations of Australian universities have been very satisfactory, with a pass rate of over 80 per cent in 1972 (the last year for which figures are available). That is a tribute to the care with which they were selected, their personal efforts, and the assistance they received from their tutors and mentors here. But impressive and important as these figures are, they are less significant than the contributions that these students have made to the economic and social development of their countries and the effects that they have had upon our relationships with their own governments and peoples.

We have trained under the Colombo Plan 1,800 engineers, 2,500 educationists, 900 agriculturalists, 900 medical and health

workers, 550 nurses, and over 1,000 public administrators. I can list for you Members of Parliament, Governors of Provinces, Heads of Departments, senior scientists, professors, and a host of senior and middle administrators in Asian countries who have received their education and training with us in Australia. These are facts. They are a record of important achievement. But they are not the full story. An equally important, less easily defined, achievement is the growth of bonds between Australia and the developing countries, a heightened level of understanding between us, and perhaps most gratifying of all, a withering away of xenophobia, isolationism and racism in Australia. I have no doubt that your seminar will make its own important contribution to these great objectives of enlightenment, tolerance and understanding."