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PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORAL TALK

I want to report to you tonight about my visit to Japan and China.

The visit was most important for Australia. It was most important for all Australians.

I want to stress that the visit was the Government's first major international visit.

It was planned that way for one special reason. My Government places particular emphasis on our relations with both Japan and China - and with other countries in the South East Asian region.

We had two main objectives.

First we wanted to strengthen the Government to Government relationships with Japan and China. We wanted to involve ourselves directly with their leaders and discuss problems, discuss areas of agreement and develop a first hand understanding.

Second, we wanted to further develop and extend our trade relationships and our cultural and our social understanding.

Let there be no doubt - we achieved these objectives.

The Government's relations with Japan and China are now stronger than ever. We spoke frankly, we listened to frank views. Out of these discussions has come a greater respect for Australia as a nation.

We achieved a great deal of goodwill towards Australia. At a grass roots level, we gained much that will benefit this nation for decades ahead.

In Japan, I signed a Treaty that will materially strengthen our economic relations and add real two-way stability to our trade with Japan.

It is worth noting that Australia has no such agreement with any other country. That alone is surely a measure of how we regard our links.

In Japan we also spent many hours talking with the Prime Minister of Japan about the need for stability in our joint trade efforts.

In fact, I believe these discussions were some of the most crucial and most significant of the entire tour.

Our trade relations with Japan means a great deal to Australia and to the way in which we all live.

Some nineteen years ago, under the initiative of Sir Robert Menzies, Australia signed what was called a commercial agreement. Since then trade between us has increased by 15 times. Today Japan is our major trading partner.

Our meetings with the Prime Minister and his trade officials confirmed that both countries want stability and predictability in trade relations.

Australian companies and Japanese companies can plan and develop trade between each other knowing that both Governments will encourage their efforts.

In other areas of course our relations with Japan are of absolute importance.

Clearly, Japan will play a great role in the future of Asia and the Pacific basin region. Japan will play a crucial part in preserving stability and development in our region.

Japan is of course aware that Australia will play an important and responsible part in reaching this goal.

I want to now focus on the achievements in China.

We went to China - one of the greatest powers in the world, and with a population of 800 million - to look and to learn. We also went so that the Chinese leaders could get a first hand insight of how we see world developments affecting us in Australia.

On both counts the visit was an unqualified success.

I am very pleased to be able to report that relations between Australia and China have never been stronger.

We have developed a very solid basis for a long term period of respect and mutual understanding.

This then was our finest achievement in China.

This understanding is not something one can pick up and add a signature to.

It is something however that is going to benefit generations of Australians.

We cannot - and did not - expect rapid results from our visit to China. We did not expect or work for formal trade agreements and the like.

Building relations requires patience, persistence and understanding. This especially applies to a country whose history, culture and political structure is so different to our own.

In China, however, we were pleased to gain an assurance that they would not allow Party to Party relations - and that means communist party to communist party - to affect the relationship between Governments. That has particular importance to countries in which insurgency has been taking place.

That was a very clear statement and one which has real significance to Australia and to our neighbours.

President Marcos of the Philippines for one has no doubt of the importance of that assurance from China.

He has told me that it will give the ASEAN countries further reassurances .

Some commentators - mainly those who remained in Australia - claimed that by developing our relations with China we are aligning ourselves against Soviet Russia.

This claim is completely without foundation.

We believe that good relations with Soviet Russia are important to Australia.

The Government has had messages during the last few days that plainly indicate that Soviet Russia wants a friendly relationship to continue with Australia. They also demonstrated this with a very warm welcome given to Mr Nixon, the Minister for Transport, in the last few days.

I have no doubt that we will continue to have a good working relationship with Russia.

Overall, the visit to Japan and China has achieved a great deal for Australia.

Our relations with both countries are stronger than ever; we made great advances in economic and trade matters with Japan; we gained intimate knowledge of the thinking of Chinese leaders; and we clearly and frankly put our position on events that affect the people of Australia.

This all means that Australia will be better able to take its place as a responsible and meaningful influence in the growth and development of our own region.