

INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE GRATTAN, PAUL KELLY - CHOGMQuestion

The indications so far have been that CHOGM will be fairly disruptive for Melbourne. What action are you taking to minimise this?

Prime Minister

I have had a number of discussions with Lindsay Thompson. A couple of days ago we both had a discussion with Chief Commissioner Miller and he'll be having a press conference. We are going to take out advertisements in the papers to explain what is happening and why the roads have to be shut off. The security requirements are important. We all had a warning and a fright with what happened at the Hilton. Innocent bystanders on that occasion were killed or seriously injured and it is not just a question of protection for the Heads of Government, it is also a question of protection of other people who could be caught up in a by product of an incident. It is unfortunate that security advisers say that at certain times roads do need to be shut off and one of the reasons for this of course, is because the route is predictable and the time is predictable when people will be travelling over it, from the hotels to the conference centre, from the hotels to the opening of the Melbourne Town Hall. It is when there is a predictable movement that you have a heightened security danger. If somebody was trying to plan or do something they would be able to know within a fairly narrow time frame where somebody would be in certain circumstances. The car parking is going to be either prohibited or very severely limited in certain areas and along certain streets and again for security reasons. It is the easiest thing in the world to have a bomb with a remote control detonator in a car or somebody standing a couple of hundreds yards away with a detonator in their pocket and pressing it as some particular person goes past. You just can't take those kinds of risks. But what the Chief Commissioner will be seeking to do, what we will want to make sure is that where there is obstruction to traffic the roads are shut off so that people will know any and so they can make arrangements accordingly. Lindsay Thompson and myself have emphasised that we both want the minimum disruption to the people in Melbourne. If they know what is happening and why it is happening, then I believe it will be understood. A trial came I think without warning the other day and the intention is to publish maps of routes that will shut off, showing the times and all the rest.

Question

This will be just newspapers, there will be no TV or radio?

Mr Fraser

I have suggested there should be something on television and radio also and I am hoping to report in the next day or two what in fact is planned.

Question

Suggested to the Victorian Government?

Mr Fraser

No, I have suggested it to our own people. This is an expense which is part of the CHOGM expenses unfortunately.

Question

What about the overall cost. There have been some criticisms that it is unnecessarily lavish. What is the all-up cost?

Prime Minister

Well, the costs are pretty much as have been indicated, but there is about \$4 million worth of cost which is furniture, equipment, carpets, which will be used by the Commonwealth and....

Question

By the Federal Government.

Prime Minister

By the Federal Government in the normal course of events, if you like, it is ordering a bit earlier than we otherwise would, but it is not lost to us. The desks are the desks that would go into Commonwealth store and we would use when there is a Commonwealth requirement and there is a continued requirement for these sort of things.

Question

What do you reckon the total cost is?

Prime Minister

You see the security equipment is going to be of great value and of continuing value. A large part of the cost is overtime for the Victorian police and that goes into millions of dollars. The total cost I think, depending on how you treat the re-usable items, is around about \$12 million. The cost is high, but that, and a major part of that, is security and I don't believe that security can or should be compromised and certainly a very great effort is being taken to do everything that can be done in that area. But I really think that this in a sense is the wrong way of getting at this particular conference. I wanted to make the points about, or saying what it is about. I wanted to make the points about inconvenience to Melbourne because I want the citizens of Melbourne to understand. Then, the important thing is what does this conference mean to Australia and why is the conference in Australia? We believe the Commonwealth Association is an important one and we also believe

I think there are two, maybe three major reasons why the conference is important to us. We live in a very dangerous and unsettled world and while we cannot have any undue feelings about what Australia, or even the Commonwealth acting together, can achieve we all have an obligation to do what we can to make the world a safer place, a more secure place and if anyone doubts the need for that just look as I have said on many occasions at the War Memorials in this city or capitals, or any Australain country town and there you will find thousands of names on honour rolls, testimony to the fact that the world was not a safe enough place on some earlier occasions. Even if what we as one country can add in some small measure, to making the world safer, then we ought to, we have an obligation to and certainly an obligation to our children. The second major reason we try and make progress in the north-south economic issues can be described in moral and humanitarian terms, but the practical pragmatic terms of politics. We are all going to be better off if poverty in the world can be diminished and when 800 million people live on less than \$A200 a year, that emphasises I think, in stark terms the extent of world poverty and the fact that hundreds of millions of people live without any of the serviwcs which every Austrlaian would take for granted, whether it is basic education or whether it is basic health services, access to hospitals, the kind of community support which people in this country accept and take totally for granted. It is not a question I believe of cutting up the productive wealth of the world differently. I believe it is a question of making a more productive world so that more people can establish themselves in a reasonable life and a reasonable future and the Commonwealth can certainly contribute to that. The Australian interest in this comes, this is obviously related also to making it more secure world and a more peaceful one, but it is also related to making it a world where there will be more trade, we will be buying more from other people and they will be buying more from us and so there is a very real self-interest in assisting in the economic take-off of a larger part of the world's population. I think the reason why the Commonwealth meeting is important is to provide a forum for a large number of the very small states, island states, so that their views, their aspirations can be heard in a world forum. A large number of them cannot even afford adequate international representation, cannot afford to be represented at the Untied Nations, so how are they to make their influence felt? This is particularly important with a Commonwealth Conference taking place in Australia at the edge of the Pacific where there are probably more of these very small staes than anywhere else.

#### Question

I wonder if we could look at some of these particular points now....

#### Prime Minister

Could I come back to the other question I wanted to make, you know why in Australia? I will say why I think it is important to Australia, but why is the Conference itself in Australia. In a very real sense it was quite simply Australia's turn.

It was mentioned, not in the sense of deserving to have it, so much as in the sense of having an obligation to provide the forum. The Conference has been in Singapore, in Africa last time, then in the Caribbean - Kingston - Canada, Britain, they are the most recent conference. And therefore where was it next to go? It would not be going to Africa again, it could have been India perhaps, it could have been Australia, well Australia was chosen. There are a limited number of Commonwealth countries with the capacity to mount the Conference. Obviously quite a significant number can, but a number of the very small countries cannot. The very fact that it costs a great deal puts it beyond the capacity of a number of countries and therefore if Australia believes seriously in the Commonwealth connection, and if we believe seriously in the issues that I have spoken about we need to try and make it a more secure world, then in a sense we have an obligation to provide a forum and to do it as well as we can.

#### Question

Let's look at some of the particular items. As far as Namibia goes, is there scope for Commonwealth diplomatic initiative here?

#### Prime Minister

Not the kind of initiative that was taken over Zimbabwe which was very much a Commonwealth problem, a Britain/Rhodesian issue. That was not in the United Nations forum in the way Namibia is very much in the United Nations forum. I have got no doubt that the Heads of Government will be wanting a report from the contact members, Britain and Canada, are part of the contact group, and what progress is being made, and what progress is in prospect. When I was in the United States, Canada, and Britain recently, I stressed the need for progress. I think it is agreed by all people that there must be and I think it is also agreed that South Africa must not be allowed to continue to frustrate progress towards a settlement. Now what specific action the Commonwealth might want to take, what we might want to say on it, will obviously depend very much on the position at the time, whether it is possible to demonstrate progress and to show that there is some significant movement. But if not, if it appears to be a stalemate at the Conference, then I would believe that there would be a number of people who would want to express fairly firm and rugged views about it and I think the Commonwealth should.

#### Question

It is possible that there could be Commonwealth representations to South Africa?

#### Prime Minister

I suppose in a sense anything is possible, but I would not want to try and pre-empt what the Commonwealth might decide, but then you have got to remember also that I have got a role as Chairman and a number of Commonwealth countries are much

closer to the Namibian issue than Australia is, and a number of them might have some very firm views about what ought to be done, but I think that will all be governed and determined by what reports would be given of progress made up to this point. As I see it, the progress is fairly minimal.

Question

- 1 Are you disappointed in the United States' attitude on the South African invasion of Angola?

Prime Minister

I think the United States looks on it as a counter to other things, but it is the wrong way to settle the issues in Southern Africa. At the moment I believe the United States, or up to the moment, I believe the United States has felt that privately it can exert pressure on South Africa so that progress can be made. Now, if that is not successful, pressure might have to become public and more evident. This progress must be made; this is part of the philosophy of what has happened in Zimbabwe. If there is no progress you get a threat to peace and if there is no progress in Namibia people who what independence will go wherever they can to get support for independence and that leads to the danger and the possibility of other countries being drawn in on one side or another. And that is part of why it is so important to make progress in Zimbabwe.

Question

Are you making any representations to the United States at the moment?

Prime Minister

No, at the moment I think, well not beyond what I have already said when I was in Washington.

Question

Angola came after that.

Prime Minister

Yes, but the Commonwealth, well I was speaking then about Namibia, specifically. The Commonwealth Conference is taking place in a couple of weeks time and there is no doubt that this will be one of the issues of importance. There is one thing that I would like to say and have it plainly understood. I saw somewhere somebody said there could be embarrassment to Australia because the Commonwealth might want to take a view different from that of the United States on these issues in relation to Namibia. Well, I am totally relaxed, I do not feel any embarrassment about that. The fact that a close working relationship has been established with the American administration and President Reagan does not mean that there is embarrassment to us if on a particular issue we take a different view.

Question

Even if it means criticism of the United States?

Prime Minister

I don't know that anyone is going to want to criticise anyone in particular over this particular issue, but I make the point in strong terms, we will take the view that we believe to be right. That was done over the issues in Zimbabwe, and there were some risks and dangers in relation to that, but it was done because we felt that there was no other course that Australia could honourably or properly take and there was certainly no other course if there was going to be a resolution of the issue, or a peaceful resolution of the issue. If the Commonwealth in a consensus way, wants to utter some rugged words, Canada and Britain are both under contact with the United States so there is a joint responsibility there for making progress, it is not just the United States' responsibility.

Question

Do you believe the United States will re-appraise its approach to South Africa as a result of Angola?

Prime Minister

So many things in foreign policy are in a constant state of re-appraisal because it is an unfolding event, you are not in a static situation and if something like the incursions into Angola take place, then clearly you have got to see how this affects other elements of policy. Now how the United States sees it they will have to answer it for themselves. But if there is no evidence of progress, I would not be at all surprised if the Commonwealth wants to take a pretty rugged approach to it. I would be expecting them to and would be surprised if they did not.

Question

On the question of Zimbabwe, you played a prominent part on the settlement there, are you now concerned at the introduction of communist advisers from North Korea and is there anything that Australia might be able to do about this?

Prime Minister

I understand this is for a limited period. It is well worth noting, I think, that these advisers are not from Eastern Europe or countries under the influence of the Soviet Union. There are still British advisers. There are a number of Australians there as teachers and technicians and whatever. I was speaking to somebody the other day who has got family connections in Zimbabwe and his view was that there is a very high regard for what Robert Mugabe is seeking to do and a high regard for what he has so far achieved in Zimbabwe.

Question

Is there any possibility that Australian assistance in the form of people on the ground to Zimbabwe will be stepped up?

Prime Minister

There is no proposal for that.

Question

(inaudible) military assistance, that is?

Prime Minister

Stepped up? - there is no military assistance.

Question

Well introduced?

Prime Minister

At the moment there are British advisers and I saw the press reports about this. I just really have not got any comment to make about it. There has been no request, there is no proposal.

Question

Is this matter under active consideration by yourself?

Prime Minister

Not particularly, no.

Question

Do you the Commonwealth Conference to re-write or extend into other areas the Gleneagles agreement? Strengthen, I mean by re-writing.

Prime Minister

I doubt it. It is reaffirmed, I would expect a number would want it reaffirmed. But even if it is not reaffirmed it still stands as a document of continuing validity. There is one thing here that I would like to say about the attitude of heads of Government. We often get suggestions that the Commonwealth will be diverted from the things that people will regard as important by the , in a sense side issues, however important those side issues might be. But I think that misunderstands the nature of the Commonwealth involvement and the attitude of Commonwealth Heads of Government who are at the meeting. They are all there giving up a week or maybe two weeks of their time, some have long distances to travel, because they believe in the Commonwealth, because they believe in a consensus approach, because they want to make progress on certain issues. The issues will be the economic ones, Southern African issues. The economic ones breaking themselves up into a number of different sections. I mentioned also the question of small states and island states.

But the Heads of Government are not, as I believe, going to allow or to want the conference to be taken over by issues however important they are, which might divert them from the major matters on which they want to make progress. I think that is sometimes misunderstood when people are commenting on what is or could happen at the Conference.

Question

But Prime Minister don't African consider sporting ties with South Africa to be an important issue and in the light of the Springbok tour of New Zealand, won't they be seeking to raise this subject?

Prime Minister

I would not have necessarily thought so.

Question

What about private session?

Prime Minister

A large number of matters will be raised, but the agenda has been agreed and nobody has suggested that particular subject should be annotated as a subject. There are subjects under which it could be raised. The South African issues if you like, or human rights issues which is under Commonwealth co-operation, but nobody, I'll have to check with the officials, but I don't think anyone has wanted that particular issue to be listed as an issue in its own right, by itself. That again, just emphasises what I am saying about the things that they want to make progress on and believe it is important to. That is not to say they don't feel strongly about sporting contacts with South Africa, of course they do and I think everyone should understand that. I have got friends, or know people, professional people, who are just out of university, who are working in South Africa and what is said about the stories, the attitudes, the rules in relation to apartheid. When you hear about it first hand I think they would horrify overwhelmingly the great majority of Australians. And these rules, discrimination continues as a matter of law in many cases and so the whole policy of apartheid is utterly repugnant. The Gleneagles Agreement is there. Everyone knows it was a consensus and the basis of consensus if you believe in it is that nobody can get the full measure of what they might have wanted. They do recognise that there has to be some degree of compromise, as there was in the drafting of the Gleneagles Agreement itself. Whether there are attempts or not to redraft parts of that document, I don't know. I have not met any great wish to see that happen and when I was in London I met a number of Commonwealth Heads of Government, again the wish seemed to be to want to concentrate on the issues they are regarding as of major importance. There seems to be a view that Fraser wants the Conference to concentrate on north-south economic issues. His wish is going to be diverted by this or by that. It is not Fraser's wish that the Conference is going to concentrate on these things, it is the Commonwealth's wish because there has been, as you know a great deal of



discussion with the Commonwealth leaders about are what are the important things, about what do you want on the agenda, how do you want it all handled. The emissaries that went around and spoke to people, they all put in their reports. So, when I say it is the north-south economic issues, these are matters which they feel passionately about and maybe again in this country we cannot understand why they feel so passionately about them, simply because we take so many of the material things of life for granted, things which you know, are totally absent.

Question

I wonder if I could just tie up this area with a couple more questions. The Brisbane games, do you think these are likely to be discussed and do you think there could be some sort of boycott, even partial?

Prime Minister

Are you talking about the games, or the mini games?

Question

The Commonwealth Games.

Prime Minister

There are some trial games as you know happening in two or three weeks time. But they are not Commonwealth Games, there are people from non-Commonwealth countries going to those and that is also something that has happened in the past?

Question

Is that going to be boycotted?

Prime Minister

It is not a question of Commonwealth Games because there are quite a number of non-Commonwealth people going to it.

Question

But whatever they are, are they going to be boycotted?

Prime Minister

Well, I have not got the list of who was asked and who has accepted, you can easily get that if you want to Michelle. The Brisbane games are in the hands of the Commonwealth Games Federation. They have got meetings scheduled to discuss matters which you know have been concerning them and how they handle them, or how they want to handle it, I don't know. I think that meeting will take place after the CHOGM meeting. It may well be that some of them would want to talk to me about the Brisbane games and if they do, I would be very happy to do so. At the moment it is in the hands of the Federation. They have got a meeting scheduled which I think will be taking place shortly after the Heads of Government Meeting.

Question

Do think ( inaudible)...

Prime Minister

I don't want to make any comment about that, that is in the hands of the FEderation itself.

Question

A related point, Charles Perkins, a deputy SEcretary of Aboriginal Affairs has said that black protesters in this country will stop the Brisbane GAMES. Are you concerned about this?

Prime Minister

I don't want to make any comment on what Charles Perkins has said. I think he has also said in recent times whether at the same time, that he has got quite a high regard for Commonwealth policies in the aboriginal area. I have noted that he is seeing the Head of the Department about his remarks. Of course, I will be seeing him on other matters later on this week.....(Break in transmission)....AND when I have been going around the Northern Territory he has come with me and he has always been helpful, instructive, and I have adopted the practice, from time to time, of talking to them quite directly about aspects of aboriginal policy so far as the Commonwealth is concerned. He has been on the list to have that discussion with me again and I would have done it now, if I had not been away over the last three weeks. You asked a question, I am just making the point. I will be seeing about those issues and not about these particular comments.

Question

Do you believe he should be censured for his remarks which appear to be a breach of public service regulations, or do you think there should be special rules for Charles Perkins?

Prime Minister

No, there are no special rules for anyone but he is senior head of the Department and I am not going to comment on it.

Question

Are you worried in general about the massive aboriginal demonstrations which are planned for the time of CHOGM, and do think this matter will be raised by leaders with you informally, perhaps if not formally?

Prime Minister

If anyone wants to raise it with me, I would be delighted if they do.

Question

Fathter Lini, I think, has said he will raise it with.....

Prime Minister

Yes, I know Walter Lini quite well and he is a very sincere and well meaning person and rather than anyone have any doubts about policy, I would much sooner if they do have concerns I would sooner them raise the issues with me because while some people have tried to draw analogies between what happens in Australia and some other places, I think those analogies are quite so far fetched as to be ludicrous. And in Australia, if somebody raises it, I will say, well for too long Australia did neglect aboriginal population, for too long we did not have policies that were adequately designed to assist, promote and encourage the well-being of aboriginal people. I have said this publicly before, over the last 20 years a great deal has been done, in particular over the last ten years an enormous amount has been done. Aboriginal people are not only eligible for all the programmes of educational health and welfare which are available to all other Australians, there are a whole range of special programmes in addition designed to respond to the very particular needs of aboriginal people. Like all significant human problems it is going to take some time to overcome. All the money in the world, and all the goodwill in the world could not solve this problem next month, week, next year, it is a problem that has to be worked at. There have been some very significant advances and I believe without any doubt, that overwhelmingly, if there are Heads of Government that want to ask me about this, that they will understand that. Many of them have got problems in their own countries which know are impractical, and difficult and not capable of solution in a short period. What they would want to be concerned about, or if they were raise it, we recognise that there is a problem, that we are working at it and that we are devoting very considerable resources to it.

Questions

Prime Minister, on this particular point, one of the arguments of the critics is that that problems tend to be in states like Western Australia and Queensland where the attitudes of Sir Charles Court and Mr Bjelke-Petersen are very much opposed to aboriginal land rights, can you see the Commonwealth making any progress with these two states?

Prime Minister

Well again, I have heard people who are critics of some aspects of policy in those areas say, for example of Queensland, that Queensland was amongst the first to claim aboriginal health workers and that they have been very useful initiatives. People might be critical of other aspects of policy, so you get a mixed situation, but at the same time people would understand the opportunities and the problems of working within a Federation. A number of Commonwealth countries are themselves federations. Nigeria is a federation. Sometimes state Governments will take views that a Federal Government might prefer otherwise and Commonwealth people would understand this and the Commonwealth people would understand this. Again, many of them would experience the same kind of problems. Pierre Trudeau has some problems with

a federation which are well known. It is not just a question, therefore, when power is divided of being able to wave a wand and pretend that power rested only in one place. I think the great objective I think we have is to advance the cause of the aboriginal people. It also needs to be understood that that is not going to be achieved by going to war with another administration because, however much people might like the Commonwealth to exert total constitutional power if that were to result in two administrations to be totally at war with each other over a particular issue, the aboriginal people would suffer as a consequence of that. I think that is not adequately understood sometimes out in the wider community.

Question

Does that mean you reject completely the Bill which Senator Ryan will put forward soon in the Senate?

Prime Minister

I have been away for three weeks and I have not even looked at Senator Ryan's Bill. No doubt the Minister would probably have some discussion in Cabinet on it, I will have to catch up on that. But it is a very important point. I think it is generally understood by aboriginal communities. With what Queensland is doing at the moment, it is not yet fully worked out. I think people need to wait and see what really is in Queensland's mind before jumping to conclusions about some of these things.

Question

On north-south issues and Australia's record, is Cabinet likely to consider the car industry submissions before CHOGM and take any decisions?

Prime Minister

Well, you would have to ask Sir Phillip what his timetable is. The car industry decision could not really be of enormous relevance to north-south issues. That is a question as to whether we are going to allow more European and Japanese imports into this country. The issues of more importance were the textiles matters that we decided a year ago where a larger part of the market is becoming open to imports as each year passes where we have introduced developing country preferences for the first time and I think we are the first country in the world to do so. On this particular issue, however much those who would like us to lower protection more and to lower protection on the developing countries more, I would ask those people to look at Australia's record and compare it with that of other industrialised countries, because in per capital terms we buy more than most other developed countries, if not more than all of them of the sensitive goods, textiles, apparel and footwear. In general terms our purchases from developing countries are high and ASEAN, for example, are increasing their exports by nearly 40% a year for about ten years.

Question

Do you think you have played down somewhat the positive aspects of the textile decision in the way you announced it last year?

Prime Minister

I think the industry understood. If somebody wants to say to us a market should be more open, that is a legitimate thing for somebody with that point of view to say, but I don't think it is right for them to go on to say they should be more open because we have been so mean and miserable in the past about access to our markets because I do believe Australia is making progress. By comparison with other industrialised countries we have made great progress and in many areas our markets are far, far more open than are markets, as I would believe, in North America, or Europe or Japan.

Question

Except that view was disputed for example, by Mr (Inaudible)

Prime Minister

No, it was not at all. He has got a certain view, but I don't want to comment on a public servant's view, but you cannot dispute the facts about dollars spent per capita.

Question

He suggested Australia had not matched its rhetoric.

Prime Minister

But that is a different question. I was saying that in terms of access to markets developing countries do better in the Australian market than almost any other developed country. And the figures will show that, per capita purchases and percentage of market that is open to imports.

Question

But Mr Stone was arguing that our performance did not match our rhetoric when it comes to protection I am wondering whether you feel that such criticism from such a senior figure does undermine the thrust of your stand on this issue?

Prime Minister

No.

Question

The Government has recently considered across the board cuts in protection and you have sent a reference to the IAC on this and quite a few of your ministers, such as Mr Anthony, have made comments recently about tariffs, do you believe that the Government will be in a position, and do you think there is scope for general reductions in protection levels?

Prime Minister

Well if I could answer those questions I suppose we would not have sent a reference to the IAC. We sent a reference to get the answer.

Question

Do you think there is much scope for change Prime Minister?

Prime Minister

I think that is a matter for the IAC to do a report for us and then we will make a judgement on that, but I have always emphasised in this area two things, where it is possible protection should be lowered, but secondly, it should be gradual. There should not be undue disruption for Australian industry and that there should be time for adaption. We are not in the business, and this was clearly evidenced in the textiles decision. of causing undue disruption to Australian and to Australians well-being. At the same time, we want to meet other obligations and make this a more efficient nation and to enable us to concentrate on those things we can do best.

Question

Are you planning any way of handling the problem of the Irish hunger striker?

Prime Minister

I think if you have not read it, you should read the statement of the Catholic Bishops. I would hope...

Question

I have read it, but he does not seem to have responded to it.

Prime Minister

NO he has not responded to it and if he is not prepared to that, I don't suppose he would respond to anything that I have said, or could say. The problems of Northern Ireland are problems which tragic as they are, are ones for the British Government. They are not ones that we can get involved in. They are not ones that we have any intention of getting involved in. I think it is against the background of that remark we need to understand the thrust of the statement of the Catholic bishops.

Question

Have you been in telephone contact over the last three weeks with any other Commonwealth leaders (inaudible)?

Prime Minister

No. There has been a lot of conversation going on over the last six months and the discussions I had during the period of the royal wedding were enormously helpful and the reports of the emissaries have been very helpful in helping to assess the frame of mind, the concerns of other Heads of Government.

Question

Are you confident that Pakistan will return to the Commonwealth and if it does, does this mean that the Commonwealth is in a position to play more of a diplomatic role in that part of the world and in relation to Afghanistan?

Prime Minister

I don't really think I could answer the last part of the question. I can't at the moment see how it will enable the commonwealth to be more active. The first part, I would have to say that would have to depend on discussions that take place probably informally, or in a closed session during the Heads of Government meeting itself, you know the question of Pakistan's re-entry.

Question

Do we understand that India is quite happy to see Pakistan rejoin?

Prime Minister

I can only say that India, as I understand it, is happy for the matter to be discussed, and nothing should be implied from that one way or the other about India.

Question

What is Australia's attitude to the proposal from Gambia for a committee to investigate breaches of human rights?

Prime Minister

That will be discussed under the item Commonwealth co-operation?

Question

What is Australia's attitude to ...

Prime Minister

I think we need to look at the proposal in detail, but (inaudible) it is one of those issues where you are influenced by what other Heads of Government say. On all of these things you don't go into the meetings with a fixed view, this is our view.

Question

There was some confusion about this while you were away.

Prime Minister

But the practice of consensus means that you have to be able to take into account the views of other countries as they are expressed in the Conference. You don't go in with just a fixed position unable to move. That is not a consensus operation. On that particular item I would be very happy to listen and to hear the views of other countries.

Question

Are we concerned at all that Mr Muldoon might push the issue of human rights in other Commonwealth countries as he indicated a couple of months ago?

Prime Minister

Well I think we will just see what happens. Again, that is where the comment I made about the attitude of Commonwealth leaders to the Conference and what they have to achieve from it. Not just this Conference, any Commonwealth Conference, it is very important. There is no other Conference in the world where Heads of Government give up a week or two weeks of their time coming from wealthy countries, from the least developed countries from nearly every continent, nearly every race, nearly every kind of background that you can imagine and they do so because they value the relationship. That is the reason I believe, they would not want to allow themselves to be diverted from the main things that they regard as important.

Question

We have just got a couple of questions to finish on. We would just like to ask you, you won't be surprised about this, whether you feel you have recovered over the last three weeks?

Prime Minister

Totally, I think I probably recovered a week ago and therefore I much more enjoyed the last week.

Question

This is the third time you have been sick in recent years, is it going to mean that you will slow down a little bit?

Prime Minister

I read your advice on that. Parts of it you maybe misunderstand because a very large part of Cabinet discussions take place without me being present. Cabinet committees make final decisions not always, but overwhelmingly and I am not part of those discussions.

Question

They don't do much while you are away.

Prime Minister

Well, they are meant to. (Inaudible) I don't think that is right.

Question

Will change your style at all?

Prime Minister

What is my style?

Question

To work very hard.



Prime Minister

I think it is in my nature to work hard and I will probably go on doing it. Over the years there has been a quite steady process of evolution from the Prime Minister. You look at the Prime Minister's office five or six years ago. All the outriders have basically been moved out to other departments. I did quite deliberately. Other Prime Ministers insisted on keeping the National Gallery, maybe the Office of Womens Affairs attached the Prime Minister's Department and this did not make sense.

Question

But that is trivia, you have become more involved in the central (Inaudible).

Prime Minister

I have always been involved in the central (inaudible), but if they are major matters I think the Prime Minister must be involved. NOT necessarily involved in the fine details, but certainly involved in the broadthruisted policy of the Government.

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Question:

So, essentially, you won't be modifying the way you conduct yourself in the job?

Prime Minister:

I am not sure that your interpretation of the way things .....inaudible.. past is necessarily right.

Question:

Well that is funny because my interpretation..

Prime Minister:

If you are saying am I going to work hard at the job, of course I am going to work hard at the job. It is an important one and the Prime Minister has got to be able to - there does need to be a better understanding, as Mr Anthony said, and as I think Senator Baume might have said also, of the work load on Ministers, and of the demands on Ministers, obviously the demands on a Prime Minister. It is a large country and with modern aircraft, people expect you to be all over the country and carry on with the business of administration at the same time. Probably over the years, the pressures on government have grown with time. I would like to be able to reduce the time Ministers either sit in Cabinet or in Cabinet meetings, for example, but a large part of that workload is generated by Ministers, who, if not the major part, to the major part, by Ministers who write submissions.

Question:

Do you think that will be possible to reduce the time Ministers spend in Cabinet?

Prime Minister:

I have asked my Department to - Cabinet and Cabinet committees, sure - I have asked my Department, the Cabinet office, to do a survey and see what ways might be involved with achieving this.

Question:

When did you ask them to do that, PM?

Prime Minister:

A few days ago.

Question:

How are they going to do that? Are they going to talk Ministers ..inaudible?

Prime Minister:

I think they will just analyse the nature of the work that comes forward and see what suggestions or alternatives. But this has been done on more than one occasion, because of the pressure of work, but by far the major part of it is generated by the Departments and by Ministers as well.

Question:

When do you expect the result of this?

Prime Minister:

Not before CHOGM.

Question:

Do you think it would be better if Ministers were spending less time in Cabinet and Cabinet committees, and more time outside, perhaps dealing with people and dealing with the electorate?

Prime Minister:

Well, there is not only that, but also being present in the Parliament. If a Minister goes out of Cabinet before a Cabinet committee, he has probably got people stacked up in his office, who he needs to see, who he has made appointments with to see, and it is important for people to be able to get around. It is important I believe for them to pay more attention to what happens in the Parliament.

Question:

And the electorate as well?

Prime Minister:

The wider community.

Question:

What made you do this? Was it your illness?

Prime Minister:

No.

Question:

Coincidental?

Prime Minister:

In this particular year, we made the decision - it was virtually the RCF exercise, and so the senior Ministers involved in that most of whom were also involved in the Budget Committee have had an enormously heavy burden. I think that - and I haven't been on either of those committees, the Budget Committee or the RCF, but those Ministers have had an enormously heavy workload of Cabinet work and the RCF has the continued responsibility to oversight the implementation of those decisions. Now, we are not going to be doing another RCF exercise, so that won't there, but the workload has been very, very heavy indeed. I think that it will do good things if we can reduce the Cabinet time. I have spoken to other Ministers about that, the time that is being spent in Cabinet. One or two have even spoken to me about it.

Question:

When did they speak to you about, PM?

Prime Minister:

I think I probably made one at ..inaudible... I have just been conscious of it, mostly through the RCF and the Budget exercise.

Question:

You are also planning to get Parliament fairly early this year, aren't you? Why is that?

Prime Minister:

Well, there is not a great deal of legislation drafted and one of the things that we want to make sure of is that we don't have the rush of legislation at the end of the session. It is obviously particularly important with the Senate's composition, and it is obviously important to have legislation at the beginning of the session so that there can be matters for debate in one House or the other. That means setting firm timetables for the shutoff date of introduction of legislation and all the rest, and unless there are exceptional circumstances, the shutoff date for legislation into the Parliament is October 1.

Question:

When did you take that decision?

Prime Minister:

Some weeks ago.

Question:

So when are you going to get up?

Prime Minister:

I don't know really. We will see what happens.

Question:

But you will try and get up fairly early?

Prime Minister:

We will just see when, you know, inaudible free, but the requirements really are to make sure that the Parliament has an orderly programme of business and that..

Question:

As opposed to last session?

Prime Minister:

Last session we lost a month because of by-elections, and we also lost time because we had a number of very important matters that had to be dealt with and had to be got right. You know that, and you know what they were - Transport, Health, and there were others and the RCF exercise itself. So, having the nature of that programme as probably inevitable that we were going to lose time. But we are not going to have orderly programmes for the operation

Prime Minister: (cnt.)

of Parliament unless we have cutoff dates for the introduction of legislation. Now, if you have got an emergency like the meat business, then obviously you have to do something about that and you can't stick to a rigid formula for that. You have got to have your exceptions, but for most legislation, that doesn't apply.

Question:

Can I just ask when you expect to take the Sinai decision?

Prime Minister:

Tony Street is going to the United Nations shortly. I doubt - one of the reasons this was delayed as we have gone down the track there have been more threads that we have wanted to follow through. When I saw President Sadat, that left one or two things I wanted to follow through. We put one or two questions to the United States, not in any sense would we want to put any pressure on them in relation to it, but we are waiting at the moment for a response from them. If we haven't got it by the time Tony Street goes to Washington, he will be speaking to Secretary Haig there - he has got an appointment arranged.

Question:

Do these related to things such as chain of command for the force and.. ?

Prime Minister:

No, they are a range of matters and I don't want to go into the detail of it.

Question:

When did we put those questions to the United States?

Prime Minister:

It has been a continuing process, you see.

Question:

When is Street going to be there?

Prime Minister:

In a week's time or something. It is the annual United Nations....

Question:

So it is almost after CHOGM?

Prime Minister:

It could be. It would be wrong to write that it is imminent.

Prime Minister: (cont.)

We have offered the security thing and the Melbourne thing earlier, didn't we?

Question:

Yes.

Prime Minister:

There is one other thing that I would like to say about our attitudes to this and it is something that I can't achieve by ourselves and it is something the Government can't achieve by itself. We not only have 40 heads of government coming to this country, we have some hundreds of people in the delegations, some of the delegations or one of them, I think, is up to about 70 people..

Question:

..the opposition.

Prime Minister:

No, not in that place, it is all officials and other Ministers. You have also got, somebody said this morning, up to 800...end of tape.

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