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PRIME MINISTER

E. & O.E. - PROOF ONLY

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE FOR FOREIGN PRESS AT CHOGM
CONFERENCE CENTRE, NEW DELHI, 29 NOVEMBER 1983

PM: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Just a couple of preliminary comments that I would like before making myself available for questions. The first is of course that I'm not available for a general analysis of the conference, which, as you will appreciate Mrs. Gandhi and Mr. Ramphal will be conducting such a conference at the end of proceedings and it is not appropriate for me in any way to attempt to usurp or appear to usurp that function. I will be available to talk about any matter particularly concerning Australia and the second thing I would like to say to the non-Australian contingent, that we have had many requests for interviews and I expressed my regrets that because of the pressures of time and the conference I haven't been able to make myself available for those individual interviews and I hope that this may be some sort of substitute for that.

OK, it's over to you.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister Hawke, Australia recently announced further steps to isolate the South African Government, but they fall far short of the proposals that have been made by both SWAPO and for breaking diplomatic ties with Pretoria and full economic sanctions against South Africa. Against the background of these calls would you contemplate stronger action? And, if you would, how do you think it would affect Australia's substantial trading links with South Africa?

PM: Two or three comments on that. Firstly, the decisions which we have taken and which I announced in detail yesterday were unanimously welcomed by the representatives at the conference and were taken as amongst the strongest positions that have been adopted by any nation. Secondly, those decisions were taken by my Government in the context of what was being done elsewhere and we were going, as I say, as far as, and in many cases further than what has been done in other countries. This leads me to the third comment that if, of course, the rest of the Commonwealth and the world community were prepared to take further action, then my Government has made it clear that it would be up there with them, but if you take, for instance, the case of economic sanctions I had the experience through the decade of the 70s as

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head of the Australian trade union movement of being at meetings of the ILO in Geneva when there was a great deal of enthusiasm and motions being carried calling for universal economic sanctions against South Africa. But there was a distinct lack of correlation between the enthusiasm with which the hands were put up to vote in Geneva and the action that was in fact taken at home. So Australia has made it quite clear that if the world is prepared, or the relevant parts of the world are prepared to act in that way, Australia will be there. Australia is not going to act alone when other countries would simply be filling in vacuums that might be left by Australia. So I conclude by saying that what we've done is strong by any standards and I repeat, it was universally welcomed by my colleagues at the conference.

JOURNALIST: You met Mr. Lee of Singapore here. Could you please report on that meeting and your relations with ASEAN on the Cambodian question.

PM: Yes, well the meeting with Mr. Lee - the first meeting where I hosted a lunch for him last week was extremely cordial and direct and constructive and that meeting has been continued throughout. We have spent a good deal of time together at Goa and subsequently. I would say our relations with Mr. Lee and Singapore are excellent. There is a directness about Mr. Lee which I welcomed and indeed at the press conference that we gave after that luncheon last week at the Australian High Commission he straightforwardly said any problem that there was is over, as indeed it is. But he said that between two countries which are as robust and direct as Australia and Singapore it is likely that some time in the future there may be differences. The important thing is that we have established, I believe, a close, constructive, direct relationship between the two leaders of the countries and it is within that framework that I believe any differences that may arise in the future will be capable of being handled sensibly and in the interests of our two countries. Now, going to the second part of your question in regard to ASEAN. I said before I left Australia, both inside the Parliament and outside it, that there had been obviously a tendency to overstate the differences that appear to have arisen. There were differences but they were not differences which in my judgement in any way substantially affected the relationship and that is because the thrust of Australia and the ASEAN countries in regard to Kampuchea is basically identical. The conditions that we see as necessary for the resolution of that problem are the same as ASEAN. That is the necessity for the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops, a creation of a condition within which there can be a free expression of the will of the Cambodian people which can lead to free and independent, non-aligned Kampuchea and within which circumstance there can be a return to that unfortunate country of refugees from it. Now, those conditions are Australia's conditions. Those conditions are the conditions of ASEAN and there had been simply a difference which had led us not to co-sponsor the ASEAN resolution which basically went to the question of the emphasis upon the Pol Pot element of the coalition in Kampuchea. Now

those matters are fully understood by our ASEAN friends as a result of discussions that I and my Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden, had in Bangkok and that I followed here and that Bill Hayden has followed in Indonesia and it is not merely out of my mouth, it is clearly out of the mouths now of our friends in Bangkok, Mr. Lee, Dr. Mochtar. It is quite clear that that row, or whatever you want to call it, is over.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister what do you see as the main achievement of this particular summit?

PM: Good question. That's getting dangerously close to the sort of area that I talked about before - I really think that ought to be the province first of all of Mrs Gandhi and Sonny Ramphal. So I would make one comment in respect of Australia's position and then one, if you like, other comment. As far as Australia is concerned the importance of the Conference for me has been the opportunity to meet directly the leaders of very many important countries. And when I say important, I don't want to underestimate the importance of the smaller countries and meeting with them. I now have a basis into the future of conducting relations between Australia and other countries of the Commonwealth from a personal knowledge of the people concerned and a considerable respect for them. That's been very important to me.

As far as the Conference itself generally is concerned involving Australia I think that the inclusion of Australia in the group of five nations which has been established to work with the United Nations Secretary-General to try and get a resolution of the unfortunate situation created by the UDI there in northern Cyprus. That's important for us. We believe that we have a real interest because of the large population of Cypriot origin in Australia and our continuing involvement in the police contingent in Cyprus, and I believe that we do have an opportunity of playing a part there.

Without taking the proper area of Mrs Gandhi's and Sonny Ramphal's responsibility I would observe simply in passing that I think the way in which a common position was reached on Grenada was to me remarkable. The initial debate was tough, hard, divisive. Out of that, however, due to processes which I think could only uniquely happen in the Commonwealth, a common position was reached. And speaking for Australia, which is all I purport to speak for here, I believe that the discussion, the debate and the analysis of that situation in Grenada will have been significantly facilitated by what happened here.

JOURNALIST: As a newcomer to the meeting whose views aren't widely known about the Commonwealth how has the meeting affected those.

PM: In this way. I answered a question from my own press grouping in this way - that I have never been one to emphasise the mysticism of the Commonwealth, an element which at times people tend to wax a bit lyrical about. But what has been made clear to me is that there is a special quality or capacity for dialogue within the Commonwealth which I believe you would not find reflected in any other significant international grouping. And that was, I believe, most evident in regard to Grenada.

But picking up your 'new boy' point, when I first heard the debate I expressed the view that it seemed to me virtually impossible that you could get common ground. But the readiness of people with quite strongly divergent, and indeed conflicting interpretations initially - their capacities to listen to one another, to make some compromise, with a view to looking to the future to see what we could do constructively in the future rather than have recriminations about the past, impressed me very significantly.

I think also, again from Australia's point of view, on the Cyprus question - there was a concrete example of how this rather unique group of countries have been able to provide a working group to operate alongside the United Nations Secretary-General and as I understand it will be welcomed by the United Nations officers. Now that's useful.

In the broader area, as I've said in answer to a previous question, I think it does provide a particular chance to get to know a range of people - aligned, non-aligned, from every geographical area, from every stage of economic development.

JOURNALIST: From what one has heard in the lobbies you appear to stand somewhere to the right of Mr Muldoon on economic support towards Bretton Woods. Would give us some idea of the area of your disagreement ... terms of your position on third world problems.

PM: May I say as an example of the futility of the facile application of tags like right and left in complex issues like this, it may facilitate your journalism, it does nothing for the understanding of issues.

The fact is that Muldoon, for a considerable period of time, has had a view about the inadequacy of the existing institutions which grew out of the Bretton Woods arrangement to deal with the sorts of problems that are confronting the world economic community in the 1980's. Now let's get the points of agreement and then the different points of emphasis. It's got nothing to do in this issue with left or right, or any other tag of convenience.

The point of agreement between everyone would be that the world of the 1980's and as we move towards the end of the twentieth, is a different more complex world from the uncertainties that characterised the end of the second world war. I would argue, and I think the evidence is irrefutable, that those institutions

established at the end of the war have in fact shown a degree of adaptability. The charter of the IMF has in fact been amended three times - a fact which some people are not aware of. And not merely in relation to its charter but in the way those institutions have operated it is self-evident that there has been a capacity to adjust within the institutions and in their facilitation with the private sector that has meant that the problems of the indebted countries have been capable of being dealt with in a way which would not have been imagined as possible several years ago. And therefore my view, the view of others, is that you've got to temper an understanding of the dimensions of the problems that we're talking about with the realistic objectives of trying to make sure that the major donor countries, the contributor countries, to these institutions - that they are going to remain co-operative and improve the operation of the institutions. Those are my views and therefore I say that what's sensible is to try to ensure that the existing institutions have their capacities maintained as a first step, in other words there is the 8th IMF quotas that have to be finalised, general arrangements to borrow, the replenishment of the IDA has to be finalised by July of next year. Now it just seems to me a matter of common sense to have as a first objective the meeting of those existing requirements for the institutions. Then if we find, as I believe we would, that there is a need to add to those capacities then we should address ourselves to that. In other words you're more likely to have this marrying of the meeting of the dimensions of the problems with the involvements of the major countries who have to provide the facilities for these things to work. We're likely to marry those things together effectively if you do it through the approach of trying to increase the effectiveness of existing institutions.

Within that approach there is room for some preliminary sorbent(?) approach to a more general review and Mrs Gandhi and Mr Ramphal will address themselves in talking about the conference to what the conference has in fact done.

JOURNALIST: The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had ... some figures in making this whole approach to the Interim Monetary Conference somewhat halting and half-hearted ... (inaudible)

PM: It's not appropriate that I should address myself to that because it is a decision taken yesterday and it will be for Mrs Gandhi and Mr Ramphal to explain that to you. As I said at the outset I'm not here to try in any way to pre-empt their exposition to you of the decision of the conference.

JOURNALIST: Could I take up a new point if I may - your 'new boy' point.

PM: It wasn't mine it was someone else's.

JOURNALIST: You used the phrase yourself, so I hope you don't mind if I use it.

PM: No, no I don't mind sharing things.

JOURNALIST: It was reported that your first impressions of the way the mission's organised was that it was at the retreat that the hard work was done and that the sessions here in Dehli were perhaps less useful and that perhaps that what might be more productive in the future would be a four day retreat type conference.

PM: You don't capture exactly what I said because there is no way in which I would say that the work here hasn't been hard and in many ways as productive. But you do get to the basic points. I have a feeling that, I guess it reflects the busyness that one has at home and the importance of issues there, that you probably could handle a conference of this sort in a shorter period of time. Now I do value the retreat context which in fact most of it was involved in formal sessions. But it did provide the opportunity for effective bi-laterals. I would diffidently make the observation that it would be worth looking at shorter periods, perhaps with more preparatory work done. Let me make it clear that's not a criticism of the preparatory work that's done by the Secretariat with the conference, but what I'm rather saying is that if in fact we had more documentation before we arrived, then it may be possible to have a shorter period of conference and my preference would be in that case not to shorten but lengthen the retreat component of it. Now I just make the final observation - as far as the observations of a first attender - those are my impressions and it's the sort of thing I think which could usefully be thought about and discussed.

JOURNALIST: ... that Australia was strongly opposed to the American invasion of Grenada ... the Commonwealth peace force. As a result of this conference has Australia's view on Grenada and particularly the American invasion changed?

PM: We expressed the view in the Parliament in Australia that if we had been consulted, which we were not, before the event we would have counselled against it. And that is the view that I would hold now. I think that it is correct to say, speaking not only for myself but I know in particular the leader of one African country spoke to me just yesterday - he said he had learnt a great deal from the debate and discussion on Grenada. And anyone who sat through that debate and didn't learn a great deal should in fact not be here. And I think that the communique reflects that learning process. Again it's for Mrs Gandhi and Mr Ramphal to talk for the conference about the resolution, but I suggest if you examine it the fact that it is not recriminating about what's happened but is directing itself to how the processes of the restoration of normal government and the facilitating of what we may be able to do to help, that speaks volumes.

JOURNALIST: We have heard of the action which your Government proposes to take in regard to South Africa. Can you tell us what has prompted you to take this action and ... (inaudible).

PM: You say what has prompted me. I would remind you that I have a long history of commitment against apartheid, not merely in words but in actions. I became President of the Australian trade union movement in 1970. Very soon after that we had the prospect of the Springbok rugby tour of Australia and as head of

the trade union movement I led the fight within Australia against that visit and it wasn't an easy one I can assure. There were all sorts of threats to us involved, physical threats, legal threats. And within the International Labor Organisation the African states were kind enough early in the 70's and throughout to recognise the lead that I'd taken in Australia and the trade union movement under my leadership had taken. So I came to government with a long history within Australia and in the relevant international forums that I was involved in of expressing the abhorrence which I and the movement which I led had against that evil system. It's important that that be understood. I don't come to government having to think for the first time about this issue. So, as I said, on one other occasion, privately I think it was, that in this world there are all sorts of discriminations, favours for people and disadvantages imposed upon people because of religion, income and these sorts of things. Now all of that discrimination I find abhorrent. In respect of some of those things if a person wants to change his or her religious adherence and wants even to change his geographical position it's within the capacity of individuals if they think that the discrimination may have some basis, it's within the capacity of individuals to change. If I want to become black I can't become black. If you want to become white you can't become white. And it just seems to me intrinsically abhorrent that something which is totally outside the capacity of a person to do anything should in any conceivable circumstance be made a basis of discrimination. That's something that I have felt deeply all my life and so do my colleagues within my Government. So what we have done when we came to Government merely reflected deep convictions that we hold. And I said in my contribution yesterday that - I paid tribute to my predecessor and indeed it should go back before that to the previous Labor Government under Mr Whitlam who took a very strong stand which was respected throughout the African countries. Mr Fraser to his credit coming from a more difficult, if you like, philosophical background maintained the position which had been initiated by the Whitlam Labor Government and I pay him credit for that. We felt when we came to office that there was more that could be done and so we have acted in that way. We've strengthened the stand in regard to sporting contacts. We have indicated that there is welcome on our part for the African National Congress and Swapo to open offices in Australia. We've started to establish a system of scholarships for those discriminated against within South Africa to give them the opportunity of participating in the tertiary education system which otherwise they would not have. We've made arrangements deliberately to bring to Australia outstanding opponents of the apartheid system so that there shall be in Australia the opportunity for the expressions of that view at least as equally as in our democracy is provided to the other side. And we are reviewing the airline policy between ourselves and southern Africa and we have already cut one South African Airways flight and we are reviewing the whole. So those things we have done and we have done it for the reasons that I suggest. We simply find the system abhorrent and as I said yesterday it's important that we at this conference express our rejection of the cosmetics with which the South African government is trying to delude the world at the moment - because those cosmetics even more deeply entrench apartheid into the system.

PM: cont... Now in regard to the contact group I was pleased to hear yesterday a representative of the African states, Kenneth Kuanda, and others, praising the members of the contact group for the approach that they had adopted. Particularly they were addressing themselves to the British Government and they were continuing to impress upon the British that they should adhere to their view and I'm sure they will, the rejection of the concept of linkage, a concept which we as an Australian government reject. What has been said by the British Government and has I think been accepted by the African states that a contact group has done everything that it can in respect of addressing itself to the mechanics of the electoral processes - what needs to be done to give effect to the decisions of the United Nations. Those things have been done. It now remains a question of the pressure that we put in one way or another upon the South African regime to allow the final processes of independence for Namibia to be effected.

JOURNALIST: Can the United States put that type of pressure on the South African Government.

PM: Well it is within their capacity. I said, and I repeat here, that we reject the concept of linkage and we have a good cordial relationship with the United States and within that relationship we will quietly and effectively as we can put that view to them.

JOURNALIST: From your statement you say you are heartened at Australia's point of view on South Africa ... banning the entry of rebel sportsmen into Australia?

PM: That was in the package in which we strengthened the ban against amateur sportsmen and women. We took the view that all amateur sportsmen and women wanting to come into Australia should prima facie be regarded as coming with the imprimatur of and being representative of their country. And our southern African colleagues have recognised that the total package was a strengthening. It is true that in respect of those rebels there is a recognition not only within our country but in a number of the African states that to give effect to that proposal was complex and unrealistic and so we've said we will not proceed with that. But in every other respect there was a strengthening, and that was dealing with a questioning if you like of actual practicalities. I repeat as far as the African states are concerned their judgement which was one which I would think is relevant. They have acknowledged and welcomed the fact that the package as a whole is a strengthening of our position in that area.

JOURNALIST: Can I ask a personal question. More than 30 years ago you first came to India and you converted from religion to socialism.

PM: The premise of your question is wrong so you're going to be in trouble. Can I tell you what happened and then you may want to reframe your question. I came here to a world conference of Christian youth as a member of an Australian delegation. My experiences here started the processes of doubt in my mind which accelerated and that was a conversion if you like from faith to agnosticism. It wasn't the sort of conversion you

talk about now. That changing of your premise still leaves you with a question.

JOURNALIST: What affect has this visit had on you and do you see any problems ... (inaudible)

P.M.: I see. No. I wouldn't say I'd led a totally aesthetic few days since I've been here. But it has been a very disciplined few days and I'm proud of that. The experience I had thirty years ago was profound upon me and I hope that all of one's life is a learning process and it has been for me and this is that of another dimension to the learning process. I understand again through visiting the country the enormity of the problems that it confronts. I remind you just in population terms of the difference. I think when I came here in 1952 the population would have been 300 million odd. Now it's 680 million. The annual increase in the population of India is about equivalent to the entire Australian population. When you think about and you see the realities of that here then it concerns your understanding of the enormity of the problems confronting Mrs Gandhi, her government and indeed any government. So that understanding has been strengthened and my commitment, and not only a personal commitment, but a commitment of my Government to try and do within our limited capacity what we can to help countries and people less privileged than ourselves has been strengthened.

ENDS.