



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
BANQUET SPEECH
BANGKOK - 2 FEBRUARY 1989

Thailand and Australia have been close friends for many years now. It is a friendship based on common international interests and on an expanding economic relationship.

Moreover, Mr Prime Minister, we have a shared commitment to the democratic processes. Unfortunately we live in a world where this cannot always be said with conviction.

Mr Prime Minister, it is because we can build still further on that friendship and forge new ties between us, that I am delighted to return once more to the great city of Bangkok and the beautiful country of Thailand.

On my last visit in 1983, I paid tribute to the tremendous changes that were taking place in Thailand.

Mr Prime Minister, if anything I had underestimated the magnitude of those changes.

For Thailand's economic achievements since then have been truly remarkable. Indeed on the basis of rapid industrialisation and with a recent annual growth rate of around 10 per cent, Thailand is fast emerging as another tiger in a region already acknowledged as the fastest growing in the world.

Once again I congratulate you, Mr Prime Minister, and through you the Thai people, for your energy, resourcefulness and determination.

It is particularly gratifying that these developments have been accompanied by an obvious and substantial increase in the pace and quality of Thailand's relationship with Australia.

Two-way trade between us has more than doubled since 1983 and is now worth over A\$600 million. In that time Australian investment in Thailand has also more than doubled.

Yet it remains true that, given the potential depth of our relationship, we have still only scratched the surface.

Mr Prime Minister,

The issues we discussed this morning, the friendly and constructive nature of those discussions and the breadth of the agreements that we reached make it clear that both our Governments are determined substantially to expand our relationship.

Indeed, I believe we can claim to have put in place a new framework for the future.

We agreed to start work on an Economic Co-operation Agreement which will provide a formal channel of communication between us across the entire spectrum of our economic relationship.

We agreed to set a new target of A\$1.3 billion in two-way trade by the end of 1991 - an ambitious but achievable target which reflects our confidence in the future.

For Australian's part we see mutual benefit in expanding our economic and technical co-operation to encompass new and more productive activities, such as power generation and distribution, as well as communications, railways, education, and agro-industry.

We agreed to negotiate a concessional finance agreement to facilitate further links between us.

We are to renew negotiations on a double taxation agreement.

We have reached an understanding on energy co-operation.

And, not least significantly, we have agreed to a new focus for Australian development assistance, broadening its emphasis to encompass support for private sector growth and the development of public infrastructure and utilities. This not only includes new areas of Australian expertise; it also represents our recognition that Thailand's needs are changing as it grows.

Mr Prime Minister,

The mutual respect, the practical endeavour and the fruitful co-operation of our relationship is well illustrated in the pressing field of law enforcement, particularly in tackling the international trade in narcotics and in combatting organised criminal networks.

I would like to pay a special tribute tonight to the men and women in both our countries who work tirelessly to frustrate the efforts of those who seek profit from the suffering and misery of others.

I am pleased that during my visit, I will be able to inspect the Royal Crop Substitution Program. This project stands as a testament to His Majesty's commitment to assisting disadvantaged groups in your country, particularly those rendered vulnerable through their poverty.

Mr Prime Minister,

Australian-Thai relations, which are so strong at the official level, are reinvigorated on a daily basis by the significant numbers of our people who travel between our two countries. Thousands of Thai students are studying in Australian educational institutions, and they are welcome among us. At the same time, increasing numbers of Australian tourists are visiting Thailand for business and holidays.

An Australian Parliamentary delegation returned recently from Thailand and its chairman has already reported to me on the useful and positive talks that he and his colleagues held with their Thai counterparts.

All these exchanges help build those intangible but vital links which are the soundest of all foundations for friendly international relationships.

Mr Prime Minister,

The impressive bilateral co-operation that has characterised the Thailand-Australia relationship has been complemented by our joint efforts internationally through the Cairns Group, and in other forums, to create a fairer trading environment.

I pay tribute to the Thai contribution to this fundamentally important mission.

For, without a more equitable global trading system, the goals which we both seek for our peoples could be jeopardised.

The failure of the Montreal Review to make progress on the issues of vital concern to us was very disappointing. It highlights the need for a still more determined effort by the Cairns Group in the lead up to the Geneva meeting, and beyond.

The major economies of the United States, the European Community and Japan need to have sheeted home to them the fact that, without agricultural reform, there can be no equitable or meaningful reform of the international trading system.

I am very pleased that in our discussion today, Mr Prime Minister, you expressed considerable interest in ideas for enhanced consultation. Our two Governments have agreed to explore this matter further, leading to an assessment of possible more formal intergovernmental arrangements than presently exist in the region.

I welcome the fact that you will be discussing this with your ASEAN partners and we too of course will be consulting with them.

Mr Prime Minister,

In recent years we have seen an improvement in superpower relations leading to a greater degree of optimism than has been justified for many years. We must grasp the opportunities this presents to resolve problems in our own part of the world, and to work together in building a more peaceful, stable and prosperous region.

It was towards this end that I announced, in June last year, a regional chemical weapons initiative which is intended to complement the development of a global chemical weapons convention. An expert team from Australia is currently visiting South-east Asia to continue the dialogue which has already commenced within our region.

This is not an isolated example of close consultation between our Governments on international political and security issues. Over the years a habit of close and wide ranging dialogue has developed, of benefit to both sides.

We value, too, our dialogue status with ASEAN, an organisation that has an enviable record in building regional peace and prosperity.

Perhaps on no issue have we been in closer and longer contact than on the resolution of the problems in Indo-China.

Last November, Mr Prime Minister, at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, you spoke of transforming Indochina from a war zone into a peace zone, linked with the rest of South-East Asia through close ties of trade, investment and modern communications.

Those comments echo my own sentiments and they truly reflect the aspirations of Australians.

We very much welcome the new approach that you personally have brought to Thai policy towards Indo-China by building ties with Vietnam and Laos.

Vietnam must be encouraged to see that its future lies not in being an island of stagnation in a sea of progress, but in participating in that regional prosperity which is now so obvious here in Thailand. There are signs that Vietnam's leaders now appreciate that fact.

The peaceful resolution of the conflict in Cambodia is a crucial issue. This has now been a source of regional tension for more than ten years and must be resolved and put behind us if our region is fully to realise its potential. The Jakarta informal meeting process, the discussions between Prince Sihanouk and Hun Sen, and improvements in Sino-Soviet relations give cause for more hope than at any time in the recent past. Your own initiatives, Mr Prime Minister, which have involved dialogue with Vietnam, Laos and all the Khmer factions and, indeed, throughout the region have played a most valuable part in the drive towards a peaceful solution.

Many problems, however, remain, not the least being agreement on transition arrangements leading to elections and the creation of a neutral, independent and sovereign Cambodia. There is also the need to ensure that Pol Pot and those of his barbaric regime have no role in Cambodia's future.

Australia stands ready, as part of the region, to play its part in any restoration of peace in Cambodia.

It is significant, Mr Prime Minister, that the Government of Thailand and Laos have recently agreed on the desirability of building a bridge between your two countries over the Mekong River.

Accordingly, in response to your request to me this morning, I am pleased to say that Australia is prepared, subject to further consultations and agreement with yourselves and the Government of Laos, to take on the design and construction of this project.

We see it as an important physical link that can play a valuable role in the region's economic growth. Perhaps just as importantly, bridge building is a welcome symbol of the transformation of Indo-China from a war zone into a peace zone.

We also strongly support the efforts of your Government and others in the region to examine realistic and humanitarian options for dealing with the continuing exodus of people from Indochina, and in working towards an international conference on this issue.

Australia's record in resettling refugees, including from Indochina, is second to none. It is a record of which we are proud. Aside from Aboriginal Australians who can proudly claim to have resided in our continent for at least 40,000 years, every Australian can trace his or her roots back to immigration at some point during the past 200 years. We are indeed a nation of immigrants.

Although in the past our immigration selection procedures were conducted in a discriminatory fashion, I can assure you that since the early 1970s every trace of discrimination on grounds of race, and every last vestige of the outdated White Australia policy, has been expunged.

I can give you my commitment that such practices will stay in the history books where they belong. Australia will not reverse that.

To do so would be, as I have said in the Australian House of Representatives, not only morally repugnant but also economically insane.

It would be to deny the active and equal membership of the Asian-Pacific Region towards which successive Australian Governments have worked and through which our economic future undoubtedly lies. So this is something on which there will be no compromise.

Mr Prime Minister,

Australia is not selectively committed to the affairs of this region. We are totally committed to them.

So I am grateful, Mr Prime Minister, for the warm reception I have received in your country and for the hospitality that the Royal Thai Government has extended to me and Hazel.

I am particularly pleased that we have been able to establish on a personal basis such a friendly and positive dialogue.

In doing so, we have reaffirmed the warm Thai-Australian friendship and continued the close dialogue that has, for many years now, characterised our bilateral relationship.

But let us look forwards, not back.

Australia and Thailand share a future of enormous scope and potential. It is a future offering virtually limitless benefits to our people and to the people of our region.

Let us together seize those benefits and secure that future in a spirit of friendship, co-operation and diligence.
