



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PRIME MINISTER BY SHARMALA KANDIAH, FRIDAY BACKGROUND, SINGAPORE BROADCASTING CORPORATION TELEVISION, FOR TRANSMISSION AT 9.30 PM SINGAPORE TIME ON 25 SEPTEMBER 1992

FB : Int with Paul Keating

Mr PM, you made it clear that you believe that Australia's destiny lies in Asia and the Pacific. How are you going to make the Australians believe that they're part of Asia?

A Well, most of our trade is already with Asia - abt 60-70% of our exports are to the Asia Pacific area. We have a lot of relations already with the region - tourism, travel, investment. So it sort of happened naturally. I think that what we want to do if anything, is simply concentrate the effort. We're still running a current account deficit - that is our trade accounts are in surplus - but the overall external accounts are not - so if we want to grow our export mkts, these are the places to do it - and be more part of the region in a cultural sense as well.

Q Do you see some difficulty in doing that?

A Not really. Australia is a very multi cultural society. We are providing a world lesson in tolerance and the settling of many ethnic communities as part of our migration programme - in my own constituency, I have a very large Lebanese-Muslim population, I have a very large Vietnamese popn, ... communities as well as Greeks and Turks. It's a very multi-cultural place and I think Australians find relations with the region pretty easy.

Q They can't say there's no racism in Australia?

A Well, there's less than in most countries. There's always some in some corner. But the tolerance with which Australians have settled a large programme - it is the largest migration programme per capita - certainly in the Western world - you can't do that without a high degree of tolerance.

Q So you feel there's a high understanding of Asians and of the Asia Pacific in Australia.

A The natural growth of tourism and trade is taking Australians into all the parts of the Asia Pacific area, indeed all parts of the world. So it's a very international place - Australia - and I think a lot of the parochial character Australia had in say pre-war or immediately post-war has largely dissipated.

Q One thing that probably wd make Asian countries feel more kindly towards Australia is the idea of Australia becoming a republic - is that likely to happen you think?

A Inevitably, I think it will happen. It's like all things - it will change - change comes in its own natural way. The country's now more clearer abt itself, abt its destiny - it's not a derivative of any other society - it was once, it's not anymore. I think that's the impt thing.

Q Is this the majority feeling?

A Oh yes. The constitutional forms matter but they don't matter as much as the inner being, the inner feeling, the inner confidence and I think the Australians are very confident abt themselves, abt their own identity - and that they are projecting and I think that's what's impt.

Q Australia was instrumental in the formation of APEC - do you feel that there's some tangible benefit already?

A I think it's a bit early to say there's some tangible benefit from it - but I think it's a good concept. There isn't the institutional structures in the Pacific - the Asia P area - that there are in the N Atlantic, European area. And one of the principal features abt APEC - one of the things it can do is to keep the US engaged in the Asia P area, which I think is a very impt thing to do from a strategic pt of view, from a trade and cultural pt of view and as well as that, provide a forum where Japan and the US can work their problems out - but a forum which is also truly representative of the Asia P area. So APEC I think has great promise. And S'pore I might say has done well in being the institutional base for APEC, which I'm sure will provide much more growth as time goes on.

Q What shd be done to institutionalise it more - what kind of things do you see happening?

A Well I think in time the states represented, shd be represented at head of govt periodically - so it has the political horsepower that it needs to get what will be essentially a trade liberalising job done. Ministers and ministerial representn is fine - as far as it goes. But the authority which it will need, I think it can best sought from heads of govt.

Q Are you getting backing for this plan?

A Pretty substantially, yes - but again, I've got no deadline on it - I just think it's a good thing to do - and it will mean that we can sharpen up the focus of APEC as we move through its history.

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Q In terms of - you've talked abt how lot of your trade now is with Asia. The Asian countries in many ways, they're doing pretty well - what can Australia bring to them?

A It can bring a lot of technology. We have a deep pure research base, although that's now being applied - and I think you can start to see that in the things we're doing collaboratively now with S'pore investors, with other countries, in areas where we have a technological edge or where we have a natural advantage like food or food processing or minerals or minerals beneficiation or metals, or in some other specialist technologies like waste management, telecoms - these are all areas. For instance, we have a joint venture with a S'porean company in milk products which are being distributed through the region - these sort of things we can do.

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Q You've just come from Japan? How do you read your trip to Japan?

A Well, Japan has been a large investor in Australia. Japan is our largest trading partner - we have a \$6 million trade surplus with them. They've been large investors over a long period of time - we're starting to become an investor in Japan - and the two countries are getting closer together.

Q Is there any domestic resistance to Japan in Australia?

A Not very much. Obviously some of the wartime memories as they do in S'pore - but by and large, Australians know that our balance of trade has shifted many yrs ago from Europe and N America even though we do still trade substantially with N America - the weight of the change has gone towards N Asia and SE Asia and the growth really is in SE Asia.

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Q Australia and S'pore have had a good defence relationship - do you see any new things happening in that area ?

A I think like all good and close relationships - they tend to get better and we'll be doing more things - in fact, this very week we have participated with 8 ships in a joint exercise - and I'm visiting one or two of the ships tomorrow. So it's just another eg of the continuing close cooperation, not just in exercise but in personnel exchanges. In the general sides of defence - I think this 5-power defence arrangement will work well and I think Australia and S'pore have been ... of it.

Q Thank you very much.