

MASTER



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
REMARKS AT DINNER IN HONOUR OF PRIME MINISTER VO VAN KIET
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 27 MAY 1993

Embargo 8.30 pm

Prime Minister, on behalf of the Australian Government and people it is my pleasure to welcome you on this historic visit.

Our two countries have enjoyed diplomatic relations for twenty years, but this is the first time a head of government from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has come to Australia.

Let me say you are very welcome.

Those twenty years have seen the growth of cooperation and understanding on a broad range of issues, both bilateral and multilateral.

In the past few years we have seen frequent ministerial and official-level visits, cultural and scientific exchanges, and the implementation of a number of development assistance programs in education, health and resources.

In recent years our commercial relations have begun to grow strongly.

Between 1990 and 1992 two-way trade has grown from \$42 million to \$252 million.

~~Representatives of a number of Australian companies operating in Vietnam have joined us for dinner this evening.~~

We are delighted that BHP will play a major role in the Dai Hung oilfield project.

Other Australian companies are actively involved in areas such as coal processing, telecommunications and banking.

We can look with great confidence to the future of our relationship.

This morning we witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Development Cooperation covering a total of \$100 million economic assistance over a four-year period.

This should be taken as another manifestation of our friendship and maturing relationship.

Prime Minister, when we reflect on the history of the Australia-Vietnam relationship, we see proof of our capacity to change.

Proof that we can let old wounds heal, so that future generations will not inherit them and pay the price of past animosities.

The war which so ravaged Vietnam also left an indelible mark on this country.

Today, in Australia, we do not debate the rights and wrongs of our engagement in Vietnam so much as the ways in which those who fought there, and the families of those who died there, can be compensated and assisted.

Prime Minister, the Asia-Pacific region now faces a very promising future.

Your country has embarked on a program to reform and open up the Vietnamese economy to the outside world.

So, in quite fundamental ways, have we.

As a result, we now find a great many complementary interests and considerable scope for expanding our commercial relationship.

In our discussions this morning, I explained that, although Australia is a medium-sized economy, we have in many industrial sectors technologies of world-class standard.

Australian companies are well placed to help Vietnam's development in sectors such as transportation, telecommunications, infrastructure, minerals and energy, woollen textiles and services.

I was glad that today we were also able to witness the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on bilateral air services.

I am confident we will soon be in a position to establish regular air services.

Direct scheduled flights between Vietnam and Australia will assist business and tourist links, and help develop contact between our two peoples, not least, Vietnamese Australians and their families in Vietnam.

Prime Minister, as you are aware Australia is now home to 135,000 people of Vietnamese origin.

Vietnamese Australians have already made a very considerable contribution to our national life.

In the multicultural environment of this country, they have built strong and purposeful communities, and participate increasingly in our political life.

We believe that in due course the Vietnamese community in Australia will become one of the main conduits of our relationship with Vietnam.

I appreciated very much the frank and constructive discussion we had this morning about the Vietnamese community in Australia.

I warmly welcome your commitment towards reconciliation with our local Vietnamese community and your willingness to receive an Australian delegation to learn more at first hand about human rights and other conditions in Vietnam.

This gesture is greatly appreciated by the Australian Government and public.

For our part, let me say that the Australian Government will do all in its power to encourage more harmonious and constructive relations between Vietnam and the Vietnamese community in Australia.

Prime Minister, the timing of your visit to Australia is auspicious in that it coincides with the heartening news we have received this week about the high turn-out of voters in the United Nations-sponsored elections in Cambodia.

Both Vietnam and Australia played important roles in the preceding Cambodia peace process.

We share an earnest hope that the long-suffering people of Cambodia might finally be able to enjoy peace and a better way of life.

Prime Minister, we should like your visit to Australia to define a new phase in Australia-Vietnam relations.

Not only are both sides keen to expand our bilateral commercial relations, but we recognise the scope for fruitful cooperation between our countries in the wider Asia-Pacific region.

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I am also sure that the human links between our countries will become a vital source of strength to us both.

I believe we have every reason for confidence that our relationship will flourish and endure.

I should now like to invite the Leader of the Opposition to join me in welcoming you to Australia.

CANBERRA
27 May 1993