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PRIME MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
OPENING OF NEW SBS PREMISES, SYDNEY
10 NOVEMBER 1993**

It is a very great pleasure to be here this evening at the opening of the new premises of the Special Broadcasting Service.

I'm delighted that SBS has moved to Artarmon, alongside other networks. As it should be, because for a long time it has been in the media mainstream.

In fact, for a long time it has been a groundbreaker - a leader rather than a follower. A service which has directed Australian eyes to looking both at this country and its place in the world in a new way.

SBS has taught us truths about the Australian identity which not so long ago we found it convenient to ignore - truths which some people, whose names probably spring easily to mind, still sadly seem unwilling or unable to come to terms with.

It has also been an important weapon in the fight against the sporadic efforts of a few to incite outbreaks of racism and cultural paranoia in this country, not least by its ability to expose the absurdity and intellectual dishonesty of such positions.

This new building is very appropriate for SBS. Not only does it provide a home for the service which is consonant with its image - elegant, economic and efficient - but it also provides a home for the complete service, bringing radio and TV under the same roof for the first time.

That I think is important, because for some people, particularly those who speak no language other than English, the glamour of SBS television makes it easy to overlook the fact that radio is such a crucial part of the service. A part which is in such demand that it will soon be going national.

In fact I understand that it will go national next year on Australia Day.

And that is most appropriate.

It is fitting that it do so because SBS's strength is that it reaches into real Australia.

Multicultural Australia.

It does so by providing, principally through its radio service, an indispensable source of information and advice to newly arrived migrants - advice about their rights, advice about their responsibilities. Information without which they would have much less chance of participating fully as Australians in the development of this country.

It also does so by giving Australians perspectives on issues which they cannot get elsewhere. Not only through its news and documentary services, which are second to none, but also through its commitment to valuing creativity, to celebrating variety, to championing a view of Australia as a country rich in human resources, and most of all, ideas.

How nice it is to see a media service which puts a premium on ideas and their dissemination!

Valuing ideas, I have to say, doesn't seem to be something which is preoccupying a lot of other people in the media at the moment. Rather there seems to be an obsession with the superficial and the trivial; with the cheap headline rather than the in-depth analysis of issues which are of real concern and importance.

We need the media to play its part in broadening our vision.

We need it to help educate Australia about issues which are vital to our future, and which we need to resolve now. Issues which include fundamentally our multicultural population - about the competitive edge they can give us in selling our products overseas, in opening up new markets in the Asia Pacific region, where all the action is. Where Australia has to perform.

We need the media to promote Australia as a sophisticated and socially just society. As a country with which other countries see the advantage of being associated. As a country which takes itself seriously.

When did we last see a major newspaper story or TV feature from another network which acknowledged that multicultural Australia was one of the great success stories of this country's history? Or one which considered the opportunities multiculturalism has opened up for us?

But if a critic on the most unsubstantial evidence attacks the principles and working of multiculturalism it is front page news.

In truth, multiculturalism is a given - a fact of our normal life.

We need SBS, if only to remind us of this truth. And it is to the credit of the people who have shaped SBS - people like Nick Shehadie, like Brian Johns and now Malcolm Long that they have been resolute in their commitment to this principle.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This is a Government which is steadfastly committed to a multicultural Australia. Human decency demands it. Economic efficiency and commonsense requires it.

Our policies of cultural pluralism have been among the most innovative and creative in the world. They have also been the hallmark of a decent and far sighted society.

In a world often afflicted by ethnic and cultural tension, bitterness and bloodshed, Australia stands among those few countries which have avoided such conflicts.

And we have done so while celebrating rather than sacrificing our diversity.

While we need to guard against complacency, it is true to say that under the umbrella of an overall commitment to the nation and its uniting values and institutions, a society of great richness and variety and remarkable harmony has evolved.

SBS is both a symbol and a microcosm of that society.

It gives me great pleasure to formally open its new home. I congratulate all associated with the design and building of these new premises and I wish all associated with SBS a most successful future.

Thank you.