



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP

OPENING OF BORDER CONTROL FACILITY, LAOS, 6 APRIL 1994

On behalf of the Government and people of Australia I am very pleased to hand over this Border Control Facility to the Government and people of Laos.

If the Mekong Friendship Bridge which will be opened next Friday is the door to the development of Laos and surrounding regions, this building is the key.

This is the place where immigration, customs, police, banking, and postal services from the Government of Laos will facilitate the movement of people and goods across these borders.

It will be an introduction to Laos for many visitors.

Like the Friendship Bridge, which it will complement, the Border Control Facility is a very tangible expression of cooperation and friendship between Australia and Laos.

Australian companies designed and built it, drawing on traditional Lao design and on Lao technical and other assistance.

It is a model of the best sort of development cooperation, because it involved not just the provision of infrastructure from outside, but also training for Lao customs and immigration staff - some of them through sponsored overseas study teams.

And today, specialists from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation are assisting the Lao television and radio crews to cover this event as part of a five year regional program Australia is sponsoring.

Last September nothing existed on this site. Transfield Construction has completed the building since then, on cost and on schedule.

Today we congratulate all those, both Lao and Australian, who have been involved.

It is a splendid tribute to the expertise of Australian companies, and I hope it will encourage others to invest in the region.

It is also a reminder of the friendship and good will which exists between our two countries.

On Australia's side those who deserve credit include Maunsell Sinclair Knight, the project's consultant engineers; John Holland Construction, who were responsible for creating the earth platform from paddy fields; Gazzard Shelton, the supervising architects, and of course Transfield.

All of these companies provide a first rate example of what Australian businesses have to offer in the development of infrastructure in South-East Asia.

Of course, it is not only in engineering and construction that Australian companies offer expertise.

In mining, power generation, telecommunications and in education and training Australians are active in Laos.

Some 50 Australian companies are now operating here and many of them, I am pleased to say, are represented here today.

The signature of the Australia-Laos Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement which Prime Minister Khamtay and I have just witnessed will give added confidence to potential investors from Australia.

I welcome that, and the opportunities for further economic cooperation between Australia and Laos which are now being opened up.

Mr Prime Minister, I welcome also the new opportunities which this Border Control Facility will bring to the people of Laos, and I hope it will remind all who pass through it of the enduring friendship between our two countries.

And now it gives me great pleasure to declare this Border Control Facility officially open.