



# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
AND HIS EXCELLENCY MR GOH CHOK TONG, DOORSTOP,  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, TUESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 1994**

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**PJK:** Well, the Prime Minister and I have had a chance of a discussion now for over an hour and I wanted to take this opportunity again to say how pleased I am to see him in Australia with a number of Ministers. The relationship between Australia and Singapore grows more important as the years go by and I was making the point to the Prime Minister, now that Australia has really opened up its economy by reducing tariffs, removing exchange controls, by investing abroad where the whole culture of Australian business is now to go out rather than remain in, the linkage with Singapore which is itself, of course, a very famous trading entity is naturally a closer one. So, our interest is to improve that closeness and the Prime Minister proposed this morning, and I've agreed to develop a Singapore-Australia Business Council which we think can help put partnerships together for developments and investments by Australians in Singapore and Singaporeans in Australia. And as well, do things together in third countries and here the Prime Minister also proposed that we - the Governments of Australia and Singapore - through our development organisations invest in a fund which would do feasibility studies for joint participation by our industrial companies in third markets. Because the thing about Singapore is it's now highly developed in many fields in Australia, businesses at the top of their market share, and it makes no sense to be trying to expand businesses in some cases in saturated market environments. So, the obvious thing is to look at the tremendous potential of third markets and we think that Singapore and Australia can do just that. So, what we call strategic linkages, we are going to seek to do that.

We had a long discussion about APEC and our respective positions going to the Bogor meeting. I think it is fair to say Prime Minister Goh and I have a fairly close view on how we think APEC should develop

and included in that view is our very strong belief that we should give President Soeharto every support in making the meeting a success. Not just for him and for Indonesia, but for the region as a whole.

We've also discussed our defence relations and I am delighted with the fact that they are progressing very reasonably, in fact quickly. We'll soon start flying training for the Singaporean Airforce in Pearce in Western Australia and we are speaking of further collaboration in army training and as well as that in general exercises. So, I think, we are both very happy at that development.

We discussed the proposal for closer integration of AFTA and Australasia and that is something, I think, we see on the medium to longer term agenda and, I think, we are both happy to see that progress.

The other thing we discussed at some length is the possibility of tourism and tourism opportunities in Australia for Singaporean investors, but also and most especially and importantly for the people of Singapore, and particularly young people. To see young people come to Australia and get to know the place and to be able to enjoy it and to have facilities here that they can come to rather than simply find themselves lost in the tourism market. That they have actually tied facilities. So, we have discussed that and, I think, we intend to try and do something about that and make it work and, I think, that is a really encouraging thing for us to be doing. We have got our respective airlines with Qantas and Ansett and Singapore Airlines already flying with some frequency in and out of Singapore and it means, I think, where Singaporeans are very strong in real estate, we can actually do a lot here, I think, together in the tourism industry and particularly with our young people.

At any rate, I would be pleased if the Prime Minister would say some things to you and I'm sure he'll agree we will take some questions.

GOH: Yes, as you can see we have had very good, substantive discussions. Prime Minister Keating has very ably summarised the main points which we've agreed on. We have a very warm, friendly and solid relationship. Not just between Australian and Singapore, but also on the personal level - between ourselves and between our Ministers. The future looks good for us to work together in the many areas which Prime Minister Keating has just outlined. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have or you could ask questions too of the Prime Minister.

J: ... this fund that you are referring to ... how much are you talking about?

GOH: We are thinking of putting in AUS\$1 million each and the fund will also require participation by the companies concerned. It will be a three way sharing - 50 per cent by the joint venture company and 25 per cent from Australia and 25 per cent from Singapore. It will serve as a very concrete symbol of co-operation between Australian and Singapore to encourage our business sectors to work together in third countries.

J: Prime Minister Goh, you've arrived here just as the damaging shipping strike has ended. In your perspective as being the head of one of the major shipping nations in Asia, can Australia really compete when we've still got these sorts of industrial problems?

GOH: Well, if your industrial problems continue then, of course, Australia would find it more difficult to compete, but the Australians understand the problem and, I think, the problems that you have will be solved. It's got to be solved, otherwise you are going to be left in the back waters. It will be solved.

PJK: I think it is worth adding Prime Minister, this is the first, we've only had two of these generalised water front stoppages in our history and this was a short one and it was essentially about the future of the Australian National Line. But I think, the image of Australia abroad in terms of its industrial relations should square with the general facts and that is, say compared to a decade ago, industrial disputes are a third of what they were. You cannot run a country with an inflation rate of around 1 per cent unless the work force are productive and co-operative and that's, of course, what we have here. But, people also have a general interest in trying to mark out territory for themselves and this was a strategic matter for the water front unions, but I think, can I say I'm very glad they have gone back to work, but more importantly, part of that has been the general new culture of Australia, I think, which has sort of encouraged them to understand that this is not the 1970s and they can't behave as though it is.

J: Mr Keating, given the increased defence links that you just talked about, do you see any possibility for conflict - given Singapore's arms trade with places like Burma - in the region?

PJK: No. I think that Singapore and Australia have been partners in defence now way back to the Second World War and beforehand, and since, with the 5-Power defence agreement, and we do many things together for the intrinsic worth of lifting the proficiency and joint operations of our respective defence forces, and the policies of the government of Singapore in respect of its relations with other countries in the region is a matter for Singapore. I mean, our point is, what is our relationship with Singapore? And everything in our relationship with Singapore augers well for this defence relationship to grow.

GOH: And may I add that we have a responsible arms sales policy.

J: Prime Minister Goh, do you...given the momentum now towards APEC, does this leave Dr Mahathir's EAEC proposal out in the cold? If so, how do you think he is going to extricate himself from that at the Bogor meeting?

GOH: I have just met Dr Mahathir in Langkawi before I came here. He believes in EAEC much more than APEC - that's on public record, I'm not revealing a secret - and I think Dr Mahathir would still like to see EAEC move one or two steps forward, and Singapore's position has always been that we support EAEC provided it is kept consistent - provided that it doesn't undermine ASEAN - and it is compatible with APEC. To us, APEC is a very important organisation, and the EAEC must not in any way affect the progress of APEC.

J: Prime Minister Goh, given that, would you support any moves at the Bogor summit to set specific start and finish dates for free trade in the region?

GOH: We should try and aim for that, but we should also be sensitive to the other concerns, or concerns of the other countries. So we will approach this with some elasticity in mind. It can be a range of dates, starting from 2005 and ending 2020 for countries in various categories. But we should aim for some dates.

PJK: I have made the points to my colleagues in this country, Prime Minister, that the important thing is the start dates. The finish dates tend to be something that local industries very quickly pick up the changed environment and they arrive much more quickly than the nominal end-points set by governments - it's really about getting a beginning.

J: In the light of that, Prime Minister, how early do you think you might be able to get a start date? What's your best estimate?

PJK: Well, the big start is going to be the GATT ratifications. I mean, that's when we start to see the barrier falling, and that is going to be 1 January '95. I think that's the...I'm sure the Prime Minister will have heard from President Soeharto that one of his objectives is - he thinks one of the most useful that in the first instance, the very first instance that APEC can do is that the APEC members declare that they are for ratifying, quickly, the GATT undertakings.

J: Do you believe January '95 is a date that might be able to be agreed at Bogor?

PJK: I think that January '95 will certainly be the...a commitment by APEC members, I think, to GATT ratifications, and that will start the protective devices falling. I think we might leave it at that Prime Minister.

J: Prime Minister are you pleased with Senator Evans's move to the Lower House?

PJK: Well, that's a domestic, purely a domestic issue, and I'm not here to go around the world for sport, so thank you Prime Minister.

GOH: Thank you.

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