



PRIME MINISTER

18 April 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ASIA PACIFIC MAGAZINE**

E & OE.....

Thank you very much Professor Ricklefs. To Professor Terrell, the Vice Chancellor of the Australian National University, Mr Robert Gottliebsen, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. I was delighted to accept the invitation extended to me to launch this magazine. I did so for a number of reasons. One of them was that I always appreciate and respect new publishing ventures and in the spirit of competitive endeavour in the publishing and the communications world, new publications, particularly publications that aim at excellence and depth and quality rather than superficiality, are things that ought to be encouraged and applauded by governments and indeed by all participants in the political process because they add in their different ways to the accumulation of understanding and knowledge about the subjects they cover and in this particular case which of course leads me on to the other reason why I accepted the invitation - this is a publication about our region. It's a publication about what you all know to be the fastest growing and in economic terms the most dynamic area of the world. It's also a region whose relations with Australia, or should I say Australia's interaction with which has been the subject of much comment over the past few months, and my presence here today is an incremental, in its own right an incremental demonstration of the importance that I attach and my new Government attaches to Australia's association and involvement with and commitment to the political, economic and social affairs of the Asian Pacific region.

An audience like this doesn't need to be reminded of the network of bonds that exist and continue to grow between Australia and the different countries of the Asia Pacific region, but suffice it for me to remind you of a couple of them. There must be something in the order of 200 000 people in the region whose tertiary education was in Australia from the establishment of the Colombo Plan back in 1950 until now. The growing trade penetration of the region, the ready embrace of the market opportunities that exist in the region by so many Australian companies and firms, particularly in the

small and medium sized enterprise area, the contribution that is made by so many Australians of Asian descent to the life of this country, not just the business life where their mark has been very profound indeed, but also to the social, cultural and increasingly the political life of the Australian nation.

So the bonds and the linkages grow and as the Prime Minister of the newly installed Government, let me again say as I have said on a number of occasions, and my Foreign Minister is saying almost as I speak, here in the region himself, that the new Government does have a strong commitment to the Asian Pacific region. There will inevitably be some differences of nuance. There will inevitably be a different style of doing things as befits a different Government. There will be a constant assertion of those proud and distinctive Australian values of tolerance and independence and equality of opportunity which have been a hallmark of this country, and as I said on the night of the election, that I will defend and propound the values and the principles of the Australian nation, both domestically and internationally, and the basis of any proper relationship with another country is a basis of mutual respect, of an understanding that cultures and attitudes and values can be different, but those differences can be a source of nurturing a relationship rather than a reason why that relationship won't develop.

I was glad to have such an early opportunity to meet Dr Mahathir, the Prime Minister of Malaysia. We had a very valuable meeting in which each of us recognised that a strong relationship between two countries that have a lot in common but also come from different vantage points and different attitudes and some differences in sets of values, that the basis of a sound relationship was one of mutual respect and understanding and a recognition that you didn't necessarily improve a relationship by reading lectures to each other on particular issues but rather looking for points of understanding and points of common contact and mutual interest, and there are many between Australia and that particular country as there are between Australia and so many other countries in the Asia Pacific region.

I want to complement the Research School which has a very long and distinguished tradition stretching back both at its current manifestation and in some of its earlier formations, stretching back over many decades in promoting the understanding of the importance of our region to the future of Australia and many people in that school over the years have made a big contribution to a better and a more mature understanding of the importance of the region to Australia's future. I also want to complement BRW, Mr Gottliebsen and his colleagues, for being associated with another venture, and together the Centre and BRW will make I hope an important further contribution to an intelligent understanding of the nature of the different countries in the region.

The breadth of the subjects covered in the first edition is impressive and in every sense of the word I wish the magazine well. I thank those who contributed to it. I take the opportunity again of saying to all of you who are concerned about the future of Australia's relations with the region that my Government's commitment to those relations is very strong. It's firm. It will as the months unfold I think surprise a few people but we intend to do our work in relation to that association in our own way and in our own time, recognising that there is a national interest in a continuity of foreign policy stances where that continuity is natural. Where it is not natural there is little

point in trying to pursue it. I think it is fair to say that in respect of Australia's association with the region there has been a proud, bi-partisan contribution.

If one goes back to the 1950s, under Coalition Governments the great building blocks were laid. Successive governments of both political persuasions have made important contributions. I don't denigrate or decry for a moment the contribution made by the former government of this country to building our associations with the region and I think it distorts history, I think it insults the intelligence and the maturity of the Australian people for those who have different political views from mine to pretend that in some way Australia's relations with the Asia Pacific region were born after 1972, were suspended in 1975 and then resumed in 1983.

The truth of the matter is they began in the late 1950s in a big way and they continued in a sense uninterrupted from then until now although inevitably with different governments, different Prime Ministers, different personalities, different emphases, they changed over the years but I think one of the things, and I will finish on this note, that we must understand about the region and that is that the circumstances in which the countries of the region interact with each other will change and there will be a need constantly to update relationships between countries and update attitudes and in that context, I particularly welcome the reaffirmation in Tokyo of the very strong association between the United States and Japan. I believe the announcement that was made there between the Japanese Prime Minister and the American President demonstrated the capacity of that relationship to be constantly brought up to date, to be renewed and in a practical, forward looking way, make a further contribution to stability in the region but to you, Professor Ricklefs, to Robert Gottliebsen, congratulations. I wish the magazine well. I know it will make a very positive contribution to an incredibly important foreign policy focus for all Australians.

Thank you very much.