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PRIME MINISTER

29 March 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE ANSETT AUSTRALIA
SHANGHAI OFFICE, SHANGHAI, CHINA****E & OE.....**

Thank you very much. To Mr Ken Cowley, the Chairman of Ansett International, to Mr Liu, the Minister for Metallurgical Industry, Mr Jao, the Vice Mayor of Shanghai, to Mr Rick Smith, the Australian Ambassador, to Mr Rigby, the Consul General, to His Excellency, the Ambassador of China in Canberra, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am particularly pleased to be here today because the opening of this Ansett office in Shanghai is the latest demonstration of the dramatic growth in the air travel between Australia and China. Since new and expanded air service arrangements were signed in march last year, the number of airlines flying between our countries has gone from two to four, the number of weekly services has risen from two to seven, and there has been an average growth of 30% annually in the air traffic between Australia and China over that three year period.

Can I say to our Chinese guests today two things about Ansett. Ansett has been a great Australian company for a long period of time and over the last 50 years four of the best known business figures that Australia has produced in that time have been associated with the company beginning with Reg Ansett and Peter Abeles and Rupert Murdoch and our host today, Ken Cowley, so it is a company that has great Australian credentials and it is a company that comes to China with an impeccable business background.

And can I say on a personal note that until I became prime Minister just over a year ago and acquired as it were an airline of my own, I was a faithful traveler on Ansett as the airline of my domestic choice for something like 22 years and I can tell our Chinese guests that in all of that travel and in one year I think I was the third most regular flyer on Ansett, they never lost my baggage once.

The dramatic growth in air travel between Australia and China is just another element in a deepening economic and trade association but even more importantly, it underlines the growing people to people links between our two countries. Over 50 000 Chinese visitors went to Australia last year and I have every confidence particularly in the lead up to the Olympic Games in Sydney in the year 2000 which will be an absolute magnet for people all around the world and not least from people in China that that number will grow and be dramatically exceeded when the Olympic Games take place.

I want to congratulate Ansett on the care it has taken to achieve a proper cultural and linguistic blend within the services that it is offering and will offer. It is necessary that that occur and it is a proper recognition of the importance of understanding the market in which the airlines must compete for business.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the first day of a four day visit to China and I am particularly pleased that it takes place in Shanghai, the great commercial centre of China and a great city in its own right by any comparison. I am accompanied on this visit by a delegation of businessmen and women representing, or comprised of some of the most senior people in business in Australia and I have put together that delegation to demonstrate to the Chinese Government and to the Chinese people the importance I attach and my Government attaches to close co-operation between the Government and the business men and women of Australia in building an even better partnership with the Chinese Government and the Chinese people.

I last visited Shanghai in 1985. Needless to say, the change that has occurred over that eleven year period has been quite astonishing and in the short time I have already been here, the level of development and industrialisation has made a very big impression.

I want to thank the Minister and the Vice Mayor of Shanghai for the great courtesy that they have extended to me already and the welcome they extended to me last night. Ladies and gentlemen, again may I congratulate Ansett on the success it has achieved so far. Its commitment to the air traffic between Australia and China and the very important contribution that the company is making to the building of closer relations, both economic and otherwise between Australia and China. Having said that, I have much pleasure in declaring Ansett's Shanghai office officially open. I wish the inaugural flight on the 8th of June the very best of success and may many people happily and frequently travel on Ansett aircraft between Australia and China.

Thank you.