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**PRIME MINISTER**

29 October 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
ADDRESS AT LAUNCH OF THE  
JOINT VENTURE BETWEEN  
THE COMMONWEALTH BANK AND  
BANK INTERNATIONALE INDONESIA  
JAKARTA, INDONESIA**

**E&OE**.....

Mr Katz, Mr Foxlee, Mr Widjaja, John McCarthy, the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am absolutely delighted to be here tonight to formally inaugurate this joint venture between one of the most successful and best known private banks in Indonesia. A bank which of course occupies a special, almost legendary niche, not only in the financial history but also the cultural history of my country, Australia. And I am doubly delighted to have the opportunity because this event takes place at a time when there has been much turmoil on international financial markets where the focus have been on the economies of the Asia-Pacific region.

I am doubly pleased to have the opportunity of saying a few words, not only about this joint venture, but also a few words about the economic and financial situation in which the world finds itself at present and most particularly this region of the world finds itself at the present.

This joint venture is a vote of confidence by these two organisation in the economic future of Indonesia. And today I delivered on behalf of my Government a vote of confidence in the economic future of Indonesia. I took the opportunity today in my discussion with President Soeharto to remark upon the economic achievements of this country, Indonesia, under his government to indicate my very strongly held belief that the economic fundamentals of Indonesia are in very good shape, to remark upon what has been achieved in lifting the living standards of the people of Indonesia over the past 25 years, and to remind the sometime critics of Indonesia of just how much as been achieved in the face of enormous adversity during that period of time.

I also indicated to the President that the Australian Government would stand ready to participate as a friend, a regional mate, a partner, a close neighbour, would stand ready to participate in any International Monetary Fund facility or arrangement associated with present economic circumstances in Indonesia. And I did that as an expression, not only of confidence in the future of the Indonesian economy, but also as an expression of the goodwill and the sense of partnership and the sense of shared future and shared destiny that Australia feels with, not only the Government of Indonesia in a generic sense, but also with the people of Indonesia.

We are not fair-weather friends of the Indonesian people, we are friends and partners of the Indonesian people for the long haul. We see as we move into the 21 Century a growing and deepening partnership between Australia and Indonesia in this part of the world. It still remains the case that the Asia-Pacific region is the fastest growing economic region in the world. The events of the past few days and few weeks have not altered that fact and nothing can alter that fact unless those who hold responsibility in the nations of the Asia-Pacific region over the years ahead squander a great opportunity to build in the Asia-Pacific region, not only rising living standards for their people through trade liberalisation and the removal of economic barriers between people and nations, but also the tremendous political opportunities that this unique association of people in this part of the world presents to the countries, their people and their governments.

Australia's friendship with Indonesia stretches back a very long period of time. We were one of the first Western nations to identify, very openly, with the desire of the Indonesian people to achieve their independence. And through the years we have made a good friend, a good ally and a close working regional partner of Indonesia. And that partnership, and that friendship, and that alliance has been given renewed expression today in the discussions that I have had with the President of Indonesia and I will be carrying back to Australia his emphatic endorsement of the importance of our relationship.

Now this joint venture is really what the future between our two countries is all about. And this occasion is about the future, it is about the future of the region, it is about the future economic co-operation between the people of Australia and the people of Indonesia. It is about the future attraction of investment from Australia in all parts of Indonesia. And it is also about our future participation together in the globalised financial and economic world in which all of us now and forever will live. The globalised world economy carries with it instantaneous judgements by financial markets on governments, it also carries with it great opportunities of expansion and growth and it also carries with it important responsibilities and reciprocal obligations between all those nations that participate.

And this joint venture is a hard-headed business assessment made by both of the banks. They have made the decision to come together because they believe it will be good for their shareholders, they believe it will be good for their customers, they believe importantly it will be good for their employees and I am delighted to have had the opportunity in the short time that I have been here to meet many of the employees of

the Commonwealth Bank and in, of course, the future joint venture between the two organisations.

So it is, I think in every sense, a great symbolism that today - despite some of the adverse headlines of stockmarket fluctuations and of currency speculation here - you have a rolled-gold commitment by two great organisations in the economic future of Indonesia. And I think the symbolism of that will resonate throughout the business community here in Jakarta. And it will also send a very important message back to the business community in Australia. It will remind the members of the business community of Australia of the great potential of future investment in Indonesia. And it is worth recalling just how much that economic partnership has grown the way in which, over the last few years, the investment of Australian businesses in Indonesia has expanded as trade barriers have fallen our shared goals and our shared interests in working together have become more and more apparent.

And can I say, speaking for the Australians present, wherever you may bank, wherever you may invest, wherever you may borrow, you can't really think of yourself as an Australian particularly if you grew up in anywhere remotely connected with the 1950s or 1960s and early 1970s without thinking of those Commonwealth Bank money boxes. And, of course, they weren't boxes they were actually tin. It was part and parcel of growing up in Australia. It was certainly part and parcel of going to a government school in Australia that you were taught from a very early age to drop coins into that Commonwealth Bank money box as it was called. And it has been part and parcel, and I don't think I am giving a commercial against the rivals but what the heck, the Commonwealth entered the joint venture so they are entitled to a commercial from the Prime Minister particularly on an occasion like this.

It is a great Australian institution and of course in coming together with the Bank Internationale Indonesia, which has a formidable reputation as one of the great private banks of Indonesia, it does represent a great marriage, a great partnership. But can I just say again how important it is, reality is important in economics and in life, symbolism is also important in reality and in life. And this has both substance and symbolism. It has the substance of two great organisations coming together and investing in the future of Indonesia, that is the substance. And it also has the symbolism. At a time like this it is saying to the financial community of Indonesia, it is saying to the financial community of Australia and most importantly it is saying to the financial community of the world that two great organisation have enormous confidence in the economy of Indonesia, they have great confidence in the future of Indonesia. And I am absolutely delighted to be associated with the opening of this joint venture. Thank you.

[Ends]