

AUSTRALIA DAY

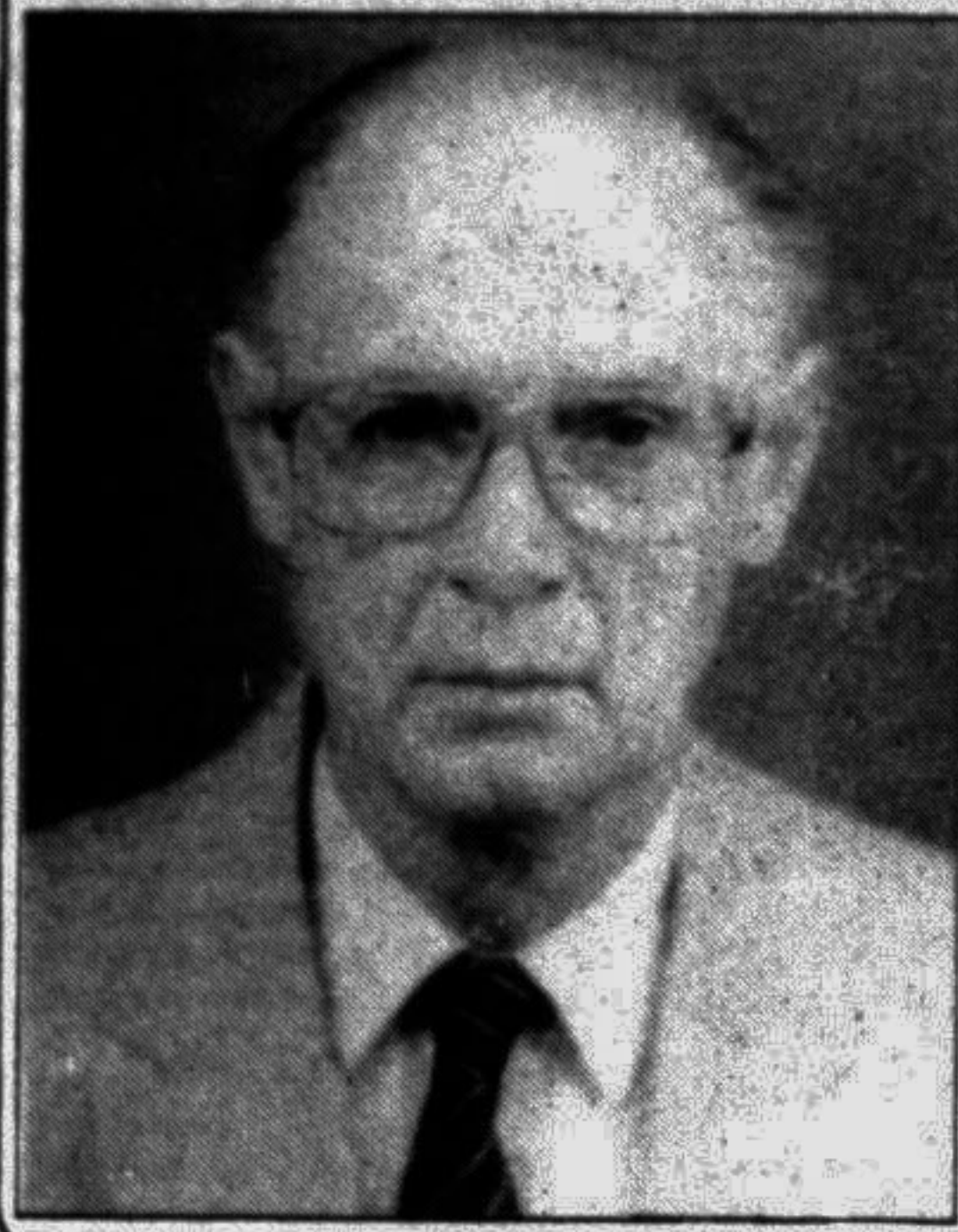


The Daily Star

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MESSAGE



On the occasion of Australia Day, I should like to extend the High Commission's greetings to all Australians living and working in Bangladesh. Australia has a good reputation in this country, due largely both to the personal contacts that have been evolved over the years among individual Bangladeshis and Australians in Australia, Bangladesh and in third countries and to the work that Australians in many fields — NGOs, religious bodies, commerce, and development have done in Bangladesh.

I would also like to take this occasion to extend the best wishes of the High Commission and Australians in Bangladesh to all our Bangladesh friends, both here and abroad. Australian Ministers were glad to receive Mr Md Saifur Rahman, Minister for Finance, when he visited Australia in 1992.

We look forward to another useful year of work in this country.

R K Gate

High Commissioner for Australia in Dhaka

Natural Beauty is Australia's Great Tourist Drawcard

by Robin Smith

A visitor who really wants to see some of the splendour of Australia could not do better than look at places on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Australia now has ten of these wilderness giants, the latest being Fraser Island off the Queensland coast inscribed in December 1992. All of them are spectacular, and fascinating.

The list of ten comprises the marine wonderland of the Great Barrier Reef; Uluru National Park in the arid heart of Australia with its red monolith, Ayers Rock; the million hectare temperate wilderness of Tasmania; the arid Willandra Lakes region in New South Wales, with evidence of 40,000-year-old humans; the Kakadu National Park of Northern Australia with its awe-inspiring sandstone escarpments; Shark Bay in Western Australia, known to tourists for the bottle-nose dolphins of Monkey Mia; the wet tropical rainforests of Queensland, the Lord Howe Island Group off the New South Wales coast; the east coast temperate rainforests of northern New South Wales; and the latest, Fraser Island off the Queensland coast.

All of them cater for tourists through tours which give visitors the best possible chance to experience the wonder and beauty of these natural places.

Under the World Heritage Convention Australia is committed to ensuring the conservation of World Heritage places for future generations and all the properties have management programs in place to protect them and ensure their survival. Visitors are asked, therefore, to respect the places they visit, leaving as the brochures say, only footprints and taking only memories and photographs.

The Great Barrier Reef, where the visitor can see part of the world's largest and most complex living coral reef system, is a maze of reefs and islands stretching 2000km along the Queensland coast and covering nearly 35 million hectares. Its 2900 individual reefs harbour more than 1500 species of fish, more than 400 species of coral, 4000 species of mollusc, 242 species of birds and an enormous array of other marine life. The Reef provides major feeding grounds for large populations of dugong, an endangered species, and nesting grounds of world significance for the endangered green and loggerhead turtles. It is also a breeding area for humpback whales which come from the Antarctic to give birth to their young in the warm reef waters.

The Great Barrier Reef was, on 26 October 1981, the first Australian area inscribed on the World Heritage List. Its waters and reefs are now administered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. The concept of the Marine Park is based on conservation of the Reef while allowing reasonable use for tourism, fishing, boating, diving and research.

There are many ways visitors can experience the Reef, cruising by boat off the mainland or the islands and anchoring over the reef, for example. But for ease of access, visitors can take advantage of the two major coral cay islands, Green Island in the north and Heron

Island in the south.

Green Island is a short boat trip out of Cairns, one of the northern international gateways to Australia. Visitors can see the marine life from a glass-bottom boat, or a semi-submersible boat and then spend some 40 minutes walking around the island itself — all in a day's visit from a Cairns hotel.

At the other, southern, extreme of the Reef is Heron Island, another coral cay, where visitors can stay as long as they wish to enjoy the exceptional snorkelling, scuba-diving, reef walking and photography that the life of the island provides. The island is 50 nautical miles from Gladstone and is reached by boat or helicopter. Apart from the marine life it is a haven for sea birds including the wedge-tailed mutton birds which migrate from Siberia between October and May to burrow in the sand and nest. It is also the site of a protected turtle hatchery where, from October to January, the turtles heave ashore, bury their eggs and return to the sea, leaving the hatchlings to break through the sand and scamper into the water eight to 10 weeks later.

The Kakadu National Park in Australia's northern tropical extremes is 120km east of Darwin. It encompasses 1307340ha of escarpments, floodplains, lagoons, rivers teeming with wild life. It contains about one third of the bird species recorded in Australia including some endangered species. Its great cultural significance lies in the ancient Aboriginal sites and the large rock art galleries up to 18000 year old.

International visitors to the park more often come via Darwin by road or by small aircraft, as part of tours of varying length. The main town is Jabiru where visitors can stay at the much-heralded Gagadju Vista hotel which is owned by



The famous Red Kangaroos

Aboriginal people and is in the shape of a crocodile. But there are other places to stay both at Jabiru and at Cooninda and the Kakadu holiday village. Light aircraft flights over the area give visitors a perspective of the vastness and scenic richness of the park while various bus tours take visitors to such sites as the Nourlangie Rock to see ancient Aboriginal art. There is a variety of tours, from spotlight walks to see nocturnal mammals to bird watching sorties and boat cruises. All of them have well trained guides to brief visitors.

About 250000 people visit the area each year. The main tourist season is from June to October, before the wet season.

In the south of Australia, the Tasmania, is the 1374000 hectares of Tasmanian Wilderness, which attracted world-wide controversy before it was finally inscribed in 1982. It has been described as "one of the last great temperate wilderness areas in the world." It contains rugged peaks, buttongrass plains, temperate rainforests, tall eucalypt forests, stands of Huon pine up to 2000 years old and some of the last wild rivers in the world. Archaeological sites include painted caves done by people 20000 years ago during the last Ice Age. The Tasmanian Wilderness covers about one quarter of Tasmania and tourist operators can arrange from Hobart, the capital, either one-day sorties or 12-day trips into the wilderness for river rafting, bush walking, scenic flight and river cruises. Most of the tours are on a conducted-tour basis and the best months of the year for favourable weather are the Australian summer months of January, February and March. From Hobart, travellers can take one-day scenic flights or engage in one-day rafting down the Gordon or Franklin Rivers.

The more adventurous could join a 10-day river rafting tour down the Franklin as far as the junction of the Franklin and the Gordon where they are picked up by cruise vessel, boat or sea plane. A softer option is a five-to-eight-day bush walk on the Overland Track in the Cradle Mountain Lake Saint Claire National Park.

The most famous of the listed properties on the World Heritage List is the Uluru National Park, inscribed in 1987. Dominated by the Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (Olgas) extraordinary rock formations of red sandstone, Uluru attracts about 250000 visitors each year. Ayers Rock

is about 9.4km in circumference and the smooth slopes of the rock rise to 340 metres. Caves around the base are decorated with Aboriginal paintings. The national park, which covers 132566 hectares, is of special significance to the Pitjantjatjara (Aboriginal) people. In fact, the area belongs to the Aboriginal people and is now leased back by the Australian Government for use as a national park. Visitors fly by domestic airlines to the closest town, Alice Springs, from Sydney, Cairns and Perth and link up with flights to

Queensland coast, has long been known locally for its cliffs of multi-coloured sands and natural beauty, and is the latest Australian listed inscribed as World Heritage. It stretches 122km along the southern coast of Queensland and is the world's largest sand island.

The White Tribe of Asia Comes of Age

by Sam Leone

INDONESIA'S Kompas correspondent in Sydney, Raith Hardjono, recently published a collection of her reporting with the powerfully symbolic title of White Tribe of Asia.

The title underlines the fact that Australia no longer looks to European or America for its security, economic, trade, cultural and lifestyle cues.

While Australia is technically not part of Asia it is alongside of it and unequivocally part of that vast crescent of nations making up the Asia Pacific region.

The Australian Government has made enmeshment with the region a cornerstone of its policies with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, saying the past decade will be seen as a crucial watershed in Australian history.

"It is a period in which we set about, for the first time, seriously and systematically to redefine our identity to give preeminence not to Australia's history, but to our geography."

"For most of the two hundred years since European settlement in 1788 it was the case that Australia fought against the reality of its own geography," Senator Evans said recently.

In embracing its geographic reality, Australia had made great strides in becoming not just a good regional citizen, but also a cooperative and active regional partner.

Australia's most developed connection with Asia is economic and trade.

On one level, Australia has been doing business with Asia for a very long time, taking advantage of Australia's raw materials during the industrialising phase in North East Asia.

Japan has been Australia's biggest market since 1966 and its biggest trading partner since 1970. Australian technical specialists have long been active in the region and many thousands of Asians have studied in Australia.

But it took a massive programme of economic and industrial structural reform over the past decade to make Australia a much more sophisticated and competitive trading nation.

The Asia Pacific region, particularly North Asia and South East Asia, has been of central importance in this strong trade push.

More than 60 per cent of

Australian merchandise exports are now sold to Asian economies and more than 60 per cent of Australia's total export growth has occurred in the region.

Australia now exports more to South East Asia than it does either to the US or to Europe.

"This is a marked change from the late 1970s when the EC share of Australia's exports was twice as large as that of South East Asia," says Senator Evans.

"Of all sectors of our exports, perhaps the most pleasing result has been in Elaborately Transformed Manufactures which have grown the fastest of all our exports — more than 300 per cent between 1981 and 1991."

Australian economic observers and commentators see a steady growth in the future of Australia's economic and trade relations with the economies of the Asia Pacific.

The Government has supported moves to create more awareness and knowledge of the potential of Asia by, among many initiatives, creating a major research body — the East Asia Analytical Unit.

The Unit has published ground-breaking reports on the future of links with North East Asia, Australian business challenges in South East Asia, future demand for grains in China, scenarios for change in the Korean Peninsula to the year 2000, post-1997 economic integration in South China and other topics.

Australia's trade diplomacy in the region was most visible

in its initiation of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process in 1989, bringing together 15 major trading economies of the Asia Pacific region in a cooperative move to free and develop trade in the region.

But Australia's links with the region and its desire to play a closer role in the area's affairs goes well beyond trade and economics.

Over the period 1989-91, Australia initiated and helped implement a United Nations Peace Plan for Cambodia, which currently involves the UN's biggest ever peacekeeping operation.

"Fragile as it continues to be, it is generally accepted that the implementation of this plan was the only way of taking the international tension out of the region's most intractable security problem," according to Senator Evans.

"At the same time it gives the Cambodian people a chance of respite after their appalling experience since 1970 of war, civil war, genocide, invasion and civil war again."

Australia has sent more than 500 defence personnel and officials to help implement the UN plan in Cambodia.

Australia has made a concerted effort to build bridges of goodwill and friendship with its neighbours in the Asia Pacific.

Australia has collaborated on important issues such as a chemical weapons regional initiative and in encouraging discussion on regional security

in response to the uncertainties generated by the end of the Cold War.

Australia has, in recent years, closed some diplomatic missions in Europe and reduced staff in others to enable it to boost representation or to open new missions in Indonesia, China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Australia also has sought to create stronger people-to-people contacts.

Most foreign tourists to Australia by far are from Asia and Australian universities and other educational institutions attract thousands of Asian students each year.

Australia is still seen as a centre of scientific and research excellence which it shares through active membership of the Association for Science Cooperation in Asia Minister Meetings (the last one hosted by Australia in Sydney).

"We certainly see educational, information and cultural programmes as having an important role to play in projecting a contemporary image of Australia in the region and reducing stereotypes held about us, and at the same time giving Australian a better understanding of the region and our role in it," Senator Evans says.

With this in mind, the Australian Government has established a number of foundations to foster better two-way understanding.

These cover China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia and India — the lat-

ter three being established in the past three years.

The Government also established a Council for Australia Abroad to coordinate the activities of all government and semi-government agencies which are involved in promoting Australia and to coordinate promotional activities with the private sector.

The Australian Government is currently aiming, through its National Policy on Languages, to increase the proportion of Australian final year high school students studying a foreign language to 25 per cent by the year 2000 — with special encouragement of six major Asian languages (Thai, Japanese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese and Malay/Indonesian).

"As we develop a closer, more engaged relationship with our Asian neighbours there are bound to be particular issues which case bumps along the way," says Senator Evans.

"One obvious area is likely to be human rights. On the part of our neighbours, it is a matter of appreciating that we put forward views on these issues not because of patronising Western arrogance, but because we sincerely believe that values of universal application are involved, inherent in the United Nations Charter.

"On Australia's part, it is a matter of appreciating that most of our neighbours strongly believe, understandably, that economic and social rights are at least as important as political and civil rights, and of emphasising them accordingly."

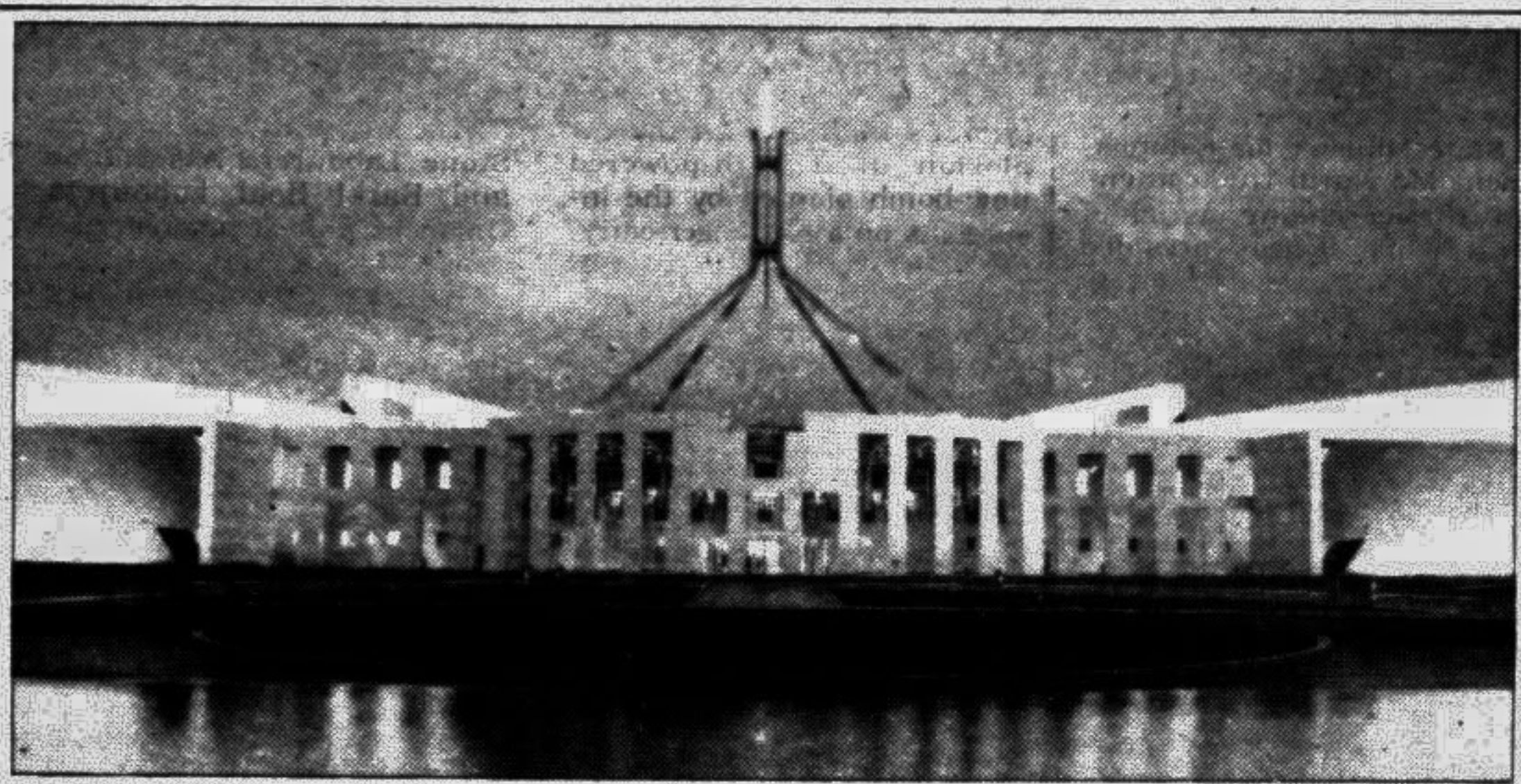
Demographically, Australia remains very much more European than Asian.

However, with the official end of the infamous White Australia policy in the early 1970s, the Asian-born part of the Australian population has grown to 600,000 or 3.5 per cent of the population and is expected to grow to seven per cent in the next 20 years.

These figures have been boosted by the resettlement in Australia of the highest number, per capita, of Indo-Chinese refugees in the world.

The White Tribe of Asia has come a long way.

As such, we are well poised to have good and close relations with all the other Asian Tribes," says Senator Evans.



The Parliament House, Canberra

dingo. It is also famous for its fishing and each year runs a major fishing competition, sponsored by Toyota, at Orchid Beach. This year the competition will be held from 15 to 22 May. All the resorts have four-wheel drive guided tours and the latest resort, Kingfisher Bay, has its own ranger guided tours. To get to the island, overseas visitors go from Brisbane to Hervey Bay road or aircraft. Hervey Bay is on the mainland and caters for visitors with accommodation and day trips to the island. If you are adventurous enough you can join a five-day horse trek or a three or five-day four-wheel drive tour.

The Wet Tropics of Queensland, inscribed in 1988, extends over 899000ha of tropical forests, waterfalls, gorges, plants and animals. It contains a living record of major stages in the earth's evolutionary history. Shark Bay in Western Australia, inscribed in 1991 extends over 2320000ha and includes a number of peninsulas, islands, bay and inlets.

Like other world heritage listings, the region's flora and fauna is rich and varied. The value of the Lord Howe Island Group, inscribed in 1982, lies in its landforms and largely intact ecosystems. The islands were formed from submarine volcanic activity and could be part of a much larger land mass linking Australia with Malaysia and New Zealand. Many rare and endangered species of plants and animals are also found in the rainforests of the Australian East Coast Temperate and Sub-Tropical rainforest parks, inscribed in 1986, and covering 16 protected areas in northern New South Wales.

All the World Heritage listings have their own, distinctive attractions and all have a great deal to offer the casual traveller, and the visitor who wants to learn about as well as experience some of the great natural wonders of the world.

Felicitations on the auspicious occasion of Australian National Day

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