



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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I will visit major Asian countries from 29 January to 13 February next year - the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Pakistan and India.

The Republic of Korea has an outstanding record of economic growth in recent years and has become one of Australia's most important trading partners. President Roh Tae-Woo was a welcome visitor to Canberra in November during his first overseas state visit. My return visit will allow me to continue discussions and to observe at first hand the positive political developments in that country.

Australia values its close relations with Thailand, which is undergoing remarkably rapid economic growth. Our two countries have co-operated on issues of bilateral and regional importance including Indo-China, refugees, narcotics, economic development and trade issues. I look forward to meeting my new counterpart, Prime Minister Chatichai, and to discussing the full range of issues with him.

My visit to Pakistan will allow me to meet Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and will reinforce international support for Pakistan's welcome return to democratic civilian rule. This will be the first visit to Pakistan by an Australian Prime Minister since 1975, when Prime Minister Bhutto's father hosted a visit by Mr Whitlam.

India and Australia have always enjoyed close relations. Our membership of the Commonwealth, our interests in the Indian Ocean region, and our mutual concern over international issues such as South Africa have seen our two countries working closely together in the international arena. I welcome this opportunity to visit the world's largest democracy and to continue valuable dialogue with Prime Minister Gandhi, who visited Australia in 1986 and whom I have enjoyed meeting on many other occasions. My visit will also provide an invaluable opportunity to reinforce further the economic and trading links between our two countries.