



PRIME MINISTER

9/94

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

VISIT TO THAILAND, LAOS AND VIETNAM

As a further step in consolidating Australia's links with important regional partners, I will be making an official visit to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam from 5 to 13 April 1994. I will in each case have the opportunity to discuss with my counterparts our shared bilateral interests as well as a wide range of regional economic, political and strategic issues.

I will also be attending the official opening of the Australian-funded Friendship Bridge over the Mckong River between Thailand and Laos on 8 April. The bridge provides the first ever road link between those two countries.

My visit to Thailand will provide an opportunity to follow up the discussions I had in Seattle last year with Prime Minister Chuan Lockpai.

Australia has a strong relationship with Thailand. Our two-way trade in 1992-93 amounted to nearly \$2 billion. Thailand's rapid growth presents considerable scope to expand our economic links, for example, through Australian involvement in infrastructure projects and provision of services for Thailand's increasingly sophisticated economy. We have worked closely with the Thai Government in the development of APEC. We also have valuable defence and security links with Thailand.

My visit to Laos reciprocates the visit by Prime Minister Khamtay to Australia in December last year. Australia has much to offer Laos as a supplier of technology, expertise and in development of major infrastructure. Transfield's successful bid for the billion dollar Nam Theun 2 hydro-power project is a good example of the contribution we can make.

Prime Minister Kiet's visit to Australia in May 1993 ushered in a new phase in the bilateral relationship with Vietnam. Our bilateral trade has grown rapidly over the past two years and I expect that growth to continue as Vietnam opens up its economy. Australia has already invested heavily in Vietnam's development, including through BHP's participation in the Dai Hung (Big Bear) oilfield project.

During my visit I will be discussing with Prime Minister Kiet ways in which our two countries can further consolidate our economic and other links. Australia needs to draw on the very constructive role that the Australian Vietnamese community can play in fostering these links.

CANBERRA
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