



PRIME MINISTER

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PRIME MINISTER'S OVERSEAS VISIT

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, said today that he had no intention of postponing again his visit to Europe, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The Prime Minister said that while Australia faces a number of difficulties related to the economy, it would be irresponsible to give the impression overseas and indeed in Australia that the country was in such a parlous state that the Prime Minister was unable to leave it during the summer recess. Moreover, to cancel or postpone again the visit at this stage would be a discourtesy to Heads of Government of the host countries who appreciated the necessity for deferring the visit in July, immediately after the elections.

The Prime Minister said that there were many important reasons why the visit should proceed at this time. In addition to other matters which would be discussed he saw considerable value in discussions on common economic problems faced, not only by Australia, but by the developed countries of Western Europe.

The Prime Minister said that at a time of crisis in the world economy there was an urgent and continuing need for leaders of Western countries to concert their economic policies in the interests of stability and welfare.

One of the great dangers of the present situation was that countries might feel themselves compelled to embark on beggar-my-neighbour policies which could only lead to economic disaster.

Policies of restriction - policies that curtail employment, production and welfare - could be fatal to the framework of the world economy as we knew it and could threaten everywhere those liberal and democratic forms that were so vital a part of our political heritage.

The Prime Minister said that discussion of these grave economic problems with European leaders at this time was not a luxury but a responsibility which any Australian Prime Minister should assume.

For this reason, too, he would be accompanied on the visit not only by senior Foreign Affairs officials and the Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade, but also by the Secretary of the Department of Minerals and Energy and by a senior Treasury official so that important matters affecting energy and the economy might be fully discussed.

CANBERRA, _ A.C.T.