



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov will visit Australia from 13-16 February 1990. He will be the most senior Soviet figure ever to do so.

Premier Ryzhkov's visit, which is in response to a long-standing invitation from me, underlines the important contact that has been developed between Australia and the Soviet Union in recent years.

My Government has worked to expand what was formerly a narrow and neglected bilateral relationship into one where we are developing co-operation in areas as diverse as trade and commerce, fisheries, human contacts and the environment. Premier Ryzhkov's visit provides a timely occasion to discuss and formalise developments in these areas. It will also allow us to examine opportunities for further expanding the economic dimension of our relationship.

Importantly, Premier Ryzhkov visits at a time when we are seeing dramatic and far reaching change in many parts of the world.

The program of reform initiated by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has brought about many positive and fundamental changes in the international scene. Nowhere have these been more dramatically illustrated than in Europe, where the Iron Curtain of division is crumbling in the face of popular pressure for reform and unity. We have also seen the Soviet Union and the United States co-operate in seeking to resolve long-standing regional conflicts such as those in Angola and Afghanistan, and in bringing about important progress on disarmament.

I will pursue with Premier Ryzhkov these various international developments, as well as issues of importance to our immediate region. I will also discuss the reforms that have been put into place in the Soviet Union since I last spoke to Soviet leaders, including President Gorbachev, during my last visit to Moscow in 1987.