

# Russia's Medvedev Heads to Thailand for Talks on Trade, Tourism

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev chairs a meeting on Russia's energy strategy at the Gorki state residence outside Moscow, March 18, 2015.

**BANGKOK** — Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev arrives in Thailand on Tuesday for a visit aimed at expanding trade and the ruling military will be keen to highlight international support nearly a year after it ousted an elected government.

Medvedev's two-day visit follows criticism from some Western countries and the United Nations of sweeping security powers granted to the military last week after martial law was lifted in most areas.

Political worry, especially after the May 22, 2014, coup, has hurt Thailand's tourist industry and it is keen to lure more Russian visitors to its Buddhist temples, beaches and bars.

Thailand has stepped up engagement with both China and Russia in response to cooler ties

with old ally the United States and other Western countries worried about the suspension of democracy and curtailment of some human rights.

Thailand accused the United States in February of meddling in its political affairs.

A Thai government spokesman, Yongyuth Mayalarp, said Russia and Thailand would sign five memorandums of understanding on Wednesday on increasing cooperation on energy, investment, suppressing drug crime, tourism and culture.

Russia has also shown interest in buying rubber from Thailand, the world's biggest grower and exporter of the commodity, and Medvedev was expected to follow up on earlier talks on cooperation with Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

"The Russian prime minister has expressed interest in Thai agriculture products including rubber," Yongyuth said.

Medvedev's visit, the first by a Russian prime minister in 25 years, will include stops at Bangkok's glittering Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

The ruble's sharp decline over the past year is exacting a toll on Southeast Asian tourism as Russians think twice about their next beach holiday in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Thailand drew 1.6 million Russian tourists in 2014, down 8.6 percent.

"Talks aimed at enticing Russian visitors to Thailand despite the Russian currency's depreciation are high on the agenda," said Yongyuth.

The military seized power after months of at times violent protests against a populist government.

It has promised to hold elections next year but democracy activists worry about the stifling of dissent and the conditions the vote will be held under.

The junta's decision to lift martial law has failed to appease critics. The United States and the United Nations expressed alarm over new security measures introduced instead of martial law with the United Nations calling the "even more draconian."

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