

Six years that changed the world

1985

- March 11: Gorbachev elected General Secretary of the Communist Party
- Perestroika and glasnost introduced
- Nov: Gorbachev and President Reagan hold first summit

1986

- April: Nuclear accident at Chernobyl. Authorities' delay in admission raises doubts about glasnost
- December: Sakharov released from exile. Other dissidents later released

1987

- August: Protests in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
- Nov: Yeltsin sacked
- Dec: Gorbachev and Reagan sign first treaty for reduction of nuclear weapons

1988

- March: Troops quell violence in Azerbaijan and Armenia
- October: Gorbachev appointed President of USSR. He promises to free all political prisoners

1989

- Feb: Last troops leave Afghanistan
- May: Elected President of the newly formed Soviet Parliament
- Nov: Communist regimes toppled in Eastern Europe

1990

- May: Gorbachev is jeered at May Day parade
- Nov: Gorbachev proposes Union Treaty, handing greater power to the republics

1991

- June: Yeltsin elected President of Russia
- August 19: Coup attempt to depose Gorbachev and reinstate hard-line Communist dictatorship
- August 21: Coup collapses. Gorbachev returns to Moscow
- Communist Party disbanded
- September: Independence of Baltic republics recognised
- December: Referendum in Ukraine supports independence by a vote of 9 to 1
- Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine proclaim new Commonwealth
- Gorbachev accepts that there is no role for a central authority; 'my life's main work has been completed'

