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Moscow looking forward to first Asean-Russia forum

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RUSSIANS are looking forward to the First Asean-Russia Business Forum scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur in April, as a platform to promote its economic and high-technology products to countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean).

Russia-Asean Cooperation Fund chairman, Mr Vladimir N Soutov, said the forum and presentation will provide an opportunity for Russian companies to present their economic and high-technology products.

"The forum will be useful for interaction and collaboration between Russian businessmen and the Government and their counterparts from Asia, especially from Asean," he told newsmen in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, at a briefing on the forum and presentation of Russian products, to be held from April 11 to 15.

The forum and presentation are being held in conjunction with the biannual Second Asean Business Summit (SABS), scheduled for April 11 and 12, which is organised by the Asean Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI).

The SABS meeting was supposed to be held last year after its first meeting in Jakarta in 1997, but was postponed to April this year due to the regional economic crisis.

Soutov said Russia's Deputy Prime Minister will lead the Russian delegation to the forum and presentation.

He also said the special five-day presentation of Russian projects in the sphere of economy and high technology will be carried out based on the agreement between Russia-Asean Cooperation Fund and Sirim Bhd.

At the press briefing, Russian commercial counsellor Mr Anatoli A Ramanov, who is based in Kuala Lumpur, said two-way trade between Malaysia and Russia has been increasing, especially after the early 1990s.

For instance, he said total trade between both countries, which amounted to US\$15 billion (US\$1 = RM3.80) in 1992, has now increased by 10 times.

"The visit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Russia in August last year has opened a new chapter in the cooperation between both countries.

"The visit also demonstrates Malaysia's interest in developing relations with Russia, especially in the aviation, aircraft and shipbuilding industries," he said.

Soutov said the Russian economic and scientific society highly appreciates the role of Dr Mahathir in the development of science, high technology, education and economy.

"We consider it difficult to overestimate his (Dr Mahathir) contribution in overcoming the economic crisis in Asia Pacific as a whole and in Malaysia in particular, as well as his role in establishing multi-directional, mutually beneficial international cooperation, particularly with Russia.

"As an example of this high esteem and interest in original ideas, based on which Malaysia successfully developed and smartly overcame the problems faced by Asia Pacific in finance and other spheres, the book of the Prime Minister's speeches was published in Moscow," he said, while holding up the book to reporters at the briefing.

Meanwhile, ACCI president Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli said strategies undertaken by Asean businesses in coming out from the regional crisis will be among the highlights of the discussion during SABS 2000.

The Prime Minister will officiate the business summit and deliver a keynote address. This will be followed by a special dialogue session between Dr Mahathir and summit delegates, Tajudin said.

He said Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid and US Secretary of Commerce William M Daley will also be invited to the summit. However, thus far, there is still no confirmation of their participation.

"It is hoped that the business summit will provide a platform for businessmen to discuss strategies, current development and collective initiatives that Asean and Asia need to implement in addressing the new economic, technological, societal and geopolitical realities of the new millennium," he said.

He said the recent economic crisis had underscored the need for a region-wide forum for Asian countries and their respective private sectors to discuss, formulate and coordinate effective approaches to common problems.

Describing the summit as timely following the economic crisis, Tajudin hopes the summit will contribute towards the enhancement of economic cooperation in the region.

He said prominent Asean political and economic leaders, businessmen, and academicians worldwide have been invited.

Among other issues expected to be discussed at the summit include those involving Asean Free Trade Area, World Trade Organisation and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation.

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