

# PM arrives in Moscow for first official visit to Russia

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MOSCOW: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here last night on his first official visit to Russia, long neglected by Kuala Lumpur as a potential new market.

The Prime Minister, who is leading a 250-member delegation, is in Russia on a four-day visit. Delegation members include five Cabinet members, senior government officials, corporate figures, MPs, sena-

tors and scientists.

Dr Mahathir first came to Moscow in 1987 when it was then capital of the Soviet Union. He was originally scheduled to visit here last September but had it postponed at the last minute due to the Sept 11 attacks against New York and Washington.

Officials said Russia had great potential for Malaysian exports and Dr Mahathir's visit, also his first official trip this year, showed Malaysia's seriousness in making

Moscow a trade partner.

Malaysia is lagging behind other Asean countries in bilateral trade with Russia, estimated at US\$300mil (RM1.1bil) annually.

Malaysia exports palm oil and rubber products to Russia and imports from it steel products.

Malaysian Ambassador to Russia Datuk Kamaruddin Mustafa said the Prime Minister is scheduled to meet President Vladimir Putin today, his third meeting with

the Russian president in the last two years. The first two were in Brunei Darussalam in 2000 and in Shanghai during the Apec summit last year.

Dr Mahathir will also visit the Russian Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Service where he would be briefed on issues relating to weather control.

Russia has developed weather modification technology to control its smog problem and Malaysia is hoping to

learn the technology to address its haze and forest fires problems.

Dr Mahathir will also deliver a keynote address at a business forum on "Globalisation towards a Fair and Prosperous World" organised by Asli, Matrade and Russia and the Asean Co-operation Fund.

Later this evening, he will be meeting Malaysian students.

There are some 90 private students studying medicine here and the number of

Malaysian students is expected to increase in future as the Government has recognised medical degrees from Russia.

Russia offers one of the cheapest fees for medical courses.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov before proceeding to perform Friday prayers at Mira Mosque, which is 100 years old.

He will leave for Germany on Saturday.