

Malaysia and Russia confident of forging closer ties

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MOSCOW: Russian and Malaysian leaders came out from their bilateral meeting at the Kremlin here yesterday with both sides expressing confidence of stronger broad-based ties in various fields including aviation, aerospace and biotechnology.

Russian president Vladimir Putin in describing bilateral ties as developing "quite positively" said he was convinced that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's four-day visit to Russia would further strengthen relations.

The two leaders met for 90 minutes before proceeding with the meeting attended by their ministers and senior government officials.

At a joint press conference later, Dr Mahathir extended an invitation to Putin to visit Malaysia.

"I have made it here after postponing it due to the Sept 11 attacks and I hope you will reciprocate and be able to visit Malaysia," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia would study the possibility of purchasing military equipment from Russia apart from sending more students to study here and sending government officials for training.

Putin said Russia saw Malaysia as a good partner in the hi-tech sector especially since Malaysia was a major produc-

er of electronic products.

He said both countries also discussed the possibility of cooperation in aerospace including using Russian mobile launchers.

Russia, he said would do everything possible to ensure that Malaysia would have direct links with all of its regions.

On terrorism, both leaders agreed on the need to eliminate its root causes, saying the United Nations' role should be strengthened to help fight terrorism.

Later, during a luncheon hosted by Putin, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was offering its experience in the market economy and established infrastructure in the commercial and industrial sector to establish smart partnerships with Russia.

In return, he said, Russia could offer its wealth of scientific and technological resources.

He said new areas of cooperation could also be explored including education, culture and tourism.

The Prime Minister said the private sector must be encouraged to explore new ranges of products and establish mutually profitable linkages.

"It would be mutually beneficial if our exporters and importers could explore ways to engage in direct trading rather than buying and selling their products through third countries," he added.