

14/03/2002

Dr M's visit to strengthen ties with Russia

Hardev Kaur

MALAYSIA-RUSSIA relations will be further strengthened and broadened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's four-day official visit - his first - to Russia beginning today.

The two countries have great potential and offer a lot of synergies for co-operation in joint ventures and in trading relations. The bilateral relations have been narrow and mainly in the defence fields.

Russia is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, diamonds and timber while Malaysia has the expertise in resource-based industries and in manufacturing. This can open up new areas of co-operation for the two sides.

The possibility of direct and increased bilateral trade and new areas of co-operation will be explored during the visit.

Dr Mahathir will hold discussions with President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin followed by a delegation meeting of the two sides.

This will be the third meeting for the two leaders. Their previous meetings have been during the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Summits in Brunei in 1999 and in Shanghai last year.

In addition, Dr Mahathir will meet Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov at the White House.

The 250-member Malaysian delegation comprising government officials and business leaders will set out to explore business opportunities in various areas.

The official delegation includes five Ministers - Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar; International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz; Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Deng.

Three Menteri Besar - Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim (Perlis), Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad (Negri Sembilan) and Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali (Perak) - and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat are also in the delegation.

They are joined by Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz and senior Government officials.

The business delegation of 150 Malaysian captains of industry is led by Chairman of Sapura Group Tan Sri Shamsudin Kadir and YTL Corporation Berhad managing director Tan Sri Francis Yeoh as his deputy.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to address Russian and Malaysian business leaders on 'Globalisation - Towards a Fair and Prosperous World'.

Some 250 Russian business leaders are expected to join their Malaysian counterparts during the Malaysia-Russia Business Forum which is organised by Asli (Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute) in association with Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade), Malaysian Embassy in Moscow, the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) and the Russia-Asean Co-operation Fund.

During the four days, Dr Mahathir will also meet Malaysian students, the majority of whom are pursuing medical studies at the Moscow State University and the Medical Academy of Moscow.

Malaysia's Ambassador to Russia Datuk Kamaruddin Mustafa, briefing the Malaysian media on the programme, said they were all private students.

Russia is increasingly being viewed as an alternative and new place for education.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit the Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Service where he will be given a briefing on the 'Modification of weather'.

The facility has been successful in controlling weather and smoke.

During the visit to the Zhukovsky Aviation Institute, the Prime Minister will be given a flight demonstration of the SU-30 aircraft. The Russians are keen to sell the aircraft to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir will perform Friday prayers at the oldest mosque in Moscow - Prospect Mira Mosque - and also hand over a contribution of US\$10,000 (RM38,000) to the Chairman of the Russian Mufti's Council, Ravil Gainutdin, for the Muslim community in Moscow.

While this is the first official visit to Russia for Dr Mahathir, he has visited Ulan Ude and Irkutsk in 1999 where he toured the shipbuilding and aircraft industries in the regions. Dr Mahathir's last official visit to Moscow was in 1987 when it was still the Soviet Union.

The visit was originally scheduled for September last year but was postponed due to the terrorist attacks on the United States.
hardev@alumni.KSG.harvard.edu

(END)