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Mahathir-Partnership

WIDE SCOPE FOR MALAYSIA-RUSSIA SMART PARTNERSHIP, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

MOSCOW, March 14 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has identified education, culture and tourism as among the new areas of cooperation with Russia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the two countries should keep their relationship broad-based and multifaceted for their mutual advantage.

Speaking at a lunch hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin here today, Dr Mahathir hailed the positive trend in trade and economic cooperation between the two countries but felt that much more needed to be done.

Bilateral trade between the two countries stood at US\$300 million a year -- an amount which he said was very small, given the size of the Russian market potential.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, arrived here last night for a three-day official visit at the start of a nine-day, three-nation tour that will also take him to Germany and Poland.

This is his second trip to Russia after visiting the Khabarovsk and Buryatia regions in August 1999. Dr Mahathir was in Moscow in 1987 for his first official visit to Russia before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"My visit here today is to reaffirm Malaysia's commitment to this spirit of friendship and cooperation," he said at the lunch after his talks with Putin and their delegation meeting at the Grand Kremlin Palace.

He said Malaysia was following with interest Russia's achievement in science and technology, heavy engineering and scientific research and development.

There was tremendous potential for cooperation in the fields of information and communication technology, aerospace industry, trade and investment, he said.

"With Malaysia's experience in the market economy and established infrastructure in the commercial and industrial sector and Russia's wealth of scientific and technological resources, I believe there is scope for creating smart partnerships," he said, highlighting the "win-win" aspect of the concept.

He said the private sectors of both countries must be encouraged to explore a whole new range of products and establish linkages. It would be mutually beneficial if Malaysian and Russian exporters and importers explored ways to engage in direct trading rather than buying and selling their products through third countries.

"Our private sectors should look beyond their borders to the economically dynamic and vibrant region of East Asia and Central Asia," he said.

Malaysia had envisaged plans to extend its economic reach to the East and Central Asian region through railway connections with China, he said.

This would pave the way for greater inter-changeability of goods and technology among countries in the region with Russia being an integral part of it.

"The prospects appear to be even better with the eventual creation of an eastern corridor that will link Southeast Asia and East Asia.

"The ensuing economic growth will in turn bring about a more stable and peaceful international security environment in the region," he said.

Dr Mahathir started the official programme today with a visit to the

Russian Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Service (Rosgidromet) and proceeded to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for a wreath-laying ceremony.

This was followed by talks with Putin and a bilateral meeting between the two sides.

The Malaysian delegation included Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Law Hieng Ding, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz.

Dr Siti Hasmah and Madam Putina joined the lunch that followed. After the lunch, Dr Mahathir will address a Malaysian-Russian business forum on the subject of globalisation towards a fair and prosperous world and later meet Malaysian students over dinner tonight.

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