

■ **Putin** visit: Dr M bestowed highest honour

Towards closer ties with Russia

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Russian President Vladimir Putin's landmark visit to Malaysia signifies an important step towards greater co-operation between the two countries, especially in economy and aerospace technology transfer.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was upbeat over bilateral relations, said today he believed ties between the two countries would be even better with the visit, first by a Russian head of state.

After being bestowed the "Orden Drusby" award, Russia's highest state award by Putin at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir said:

"Of late, ties between Malaysia and Russia have been enhanced and both nations are enjoying even more friendly relations. For Malaysia, we want to be friendly with all nations regardless of ideology and policy."

Historically, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysia at one time could not agree with Russia because its policies conflicted with Malaysia.

But times had changed, he said, and Malaysia now looked up to Russia to play a bigger role, especially in endearing itself to smaller nations that had been distanced as a result of the Cold War.

In conferring the award, Putin said it was a sign of recognition to Dr Mahathir for his efforts in strengthening ties between the two countries.

"I am giving you this award and wish you and the whole of Malaysia prosperity."

Putin said the award also signified the respect of the Russian Government for Dr Mahathir who has fought for equal dissemination of benefits for the civilisation of the world.

The words of mutual praise are natural coming from two leaders who share similar views on a number of international issues such as the need to address the root causes of terrorism, the dangers of a unipolar world, and respect for the sovereignty of nations.