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Syed Hamid-Russia

M'SIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS BOOSTED BY PUTRAJAYA TALKS

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 5 (Bernama) -- Ties between Malaysia and Russia are set to enter a new phase with pledges for cooperation in fields such as defence, aerospace, economy, education and combating terrorism made during talks headed by President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

The high-level discussions between Kuala Lumpur and Moscow at the Prime Minister's Department here were crowned by the signing of a US\$900 million contract for the purchase of 18 Sukhoi warplanes set to be delivered beginning 2006.

Briefing reporters on the outcome of the talks, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said that Russia pledged to assist Malaysia in the launching of satellites and realising its goal of sending astronauts to space.

Speaking to reporters earlier, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said that Malaysia would launch in 2005 a programme to send the first Malaysian astronaut to take part in Russian space missions as part of an offset programme for the procurement of the planes.

Syed Hamid also said that Malaysia saw the possibility for national car manufacturer Proton to set up a plant in Russia.

"Futhermore, both sides want to see that their volume of trade be increased," he said. Bilateral trade stood at RM1.34 billion last year, with the balance of trade in Russia's favour.

The Malaysia-Russia delegation meeting followed closed-door discussions between Dr Mahathir and Putin after which he bestowed the "Orden Drusby" (Order of Friendship), the highest state award of Russia, on Dr Mahathir for his effort in strenghtening bilateral relations.

In the field of education, the minister said that Russia requested that Malaysia make it easier for Russian degrees to be recognised here.

"They would also like us to explore other fields for sending our students to Russia, not just for medical studies," he said.

In view of Russian being the medium of instruction, he said that both parties were keen on the prospect of establishing a Russian language centre in this country.

There are currently about 400 Malaysian students pursuing tertiary education in various universities in Russia.

In addition, Syed Hamid disclosed that Russia would cooperate with Malaysia in efforts to combat regional terrorism.

Talks between Dr Mahathir and Putin, he said, also focused on international issues including Iraq and the situation in West Asia.

On Iraq, the minister said that both leaders share the same view that the pre-emptive invasion of that country by the United States-led coalition may not have been the most appropriate action for no weapons of mass destruction had been found there.

"And the Prime Minister has informed (Putin) that we will not be involved with the reconstruction of Iraq except in rendering humanitarian assistance," he said.

Syed Hamid said Russia and Malaysia agreed that in order for other members of the international community to participate constructively in Iraq, the United Nations should play a leading role in post-invasion Iraq.

"Both leaders agreed that the way to assist Iraq is to bring it under the total control of the UN so that an international force can come in," he

said.

Given the present unsatisfactory situation, he said, Dr Mahathir and Putin concurred on the need for the world body to assume a central role in international relations and in upholding the multilateral system.

On the restive Chechnya, Syed Hamid said that Malaysia considered the matter as that of Russia's internal affairs.

"What we are interested in is to see a peaceful solution of the issues involving Chechnya," he said.

At the contract signing for the Sukhoi purchase, Malaysia was represented by Defence Ministry Secretary-General Tan Sri Hashim Meon and his deputy, Datuk Subhan Jasmon.

Sergey Chemezov and Victor Komardin of the Russian state corporation, Rosoboron Export, inked the pact for Russia.

Kuala Lumpur and Moscow also signed two other agreements, on cooperation in science and technology as well as in information and communications technology.

The signing was witnessed by Dr Mahathir and Putin.

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