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Russian connection will provide Malaysia with new opportunities

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A VENDOR at Moscow's famous Arbat Street proudly says that he knows Malaysia. In his limited English, learned on the street, he says he has a "Made in Malaysia" television set that is "better and cheaper than other makes".

Individuals like this vendor will get to know much more about Malaysia, its people, economy and leadership following President Vladimir Putin's landmark visit to Kuala Lumpur.

Putin is the first Russian leader to make an official visit to Kuala Lumpur. It will set the stage for further improvement in bilateral relations and provide impetus to the existing good and growing relations.

During Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to Moscow last year, the two sides agreed to set up a joint economic commission and the Russia-Malaysia and Malaysia-Russia Business Councils. The Malaysia-Russia Business Council will be launched in the presence of the two leaders today, and together with the commission, will provide additional contacts and avenues for strengthening relations.

The two leaders, who have "very good chemistry between them", also hold very similar views on a number of international issues. These include the need to get to the root causes of terrorism and the importance of a just and multi-polar world based on international law and equality, mutual respect for the sovereignty of individual countries and co-operation to ensure global stability in the political, economic and social sphere.

Having met Dr Mahathir on four previous occasions, Putin says he is impressed with Malaysia's consistency of policies and respect for law.

In an interview at his official residence, Novo Ogoryovo, outside Moscow, Putin described the bilateral relations as "businesslike and amicable".

He pointed out that economic and trade ties have improved with trade growing by 34 per cent.

Russia is rich in resources, skills and talent. Combining Russian resources and Malaysian expertise can yield handsome results for both parties.

But Moscow lacks the market knowhow and marketing skills to maximise its skills and capabilities. A Russian businessman said he hoped Malaysia would be able to lead them into the regional and international markets.

In fact, Dr Mahathir, during his visit to Moscow last year, offered Kuala Lumpur as a base for Russian businesses and entrepreneurs for the regional market. And with Russia "open for business", there are ample opportunities for Malaysian entrepreneurs.

According to Andrei Illarionov, economic adviser to Putin, Russia is currently experiencing an economic boom. He points out that there has been significant growth in industrial output, double-digit growth in investments, increase in exports and imports, and growth of household incomes by more than 14 per cent in real terms.

Putin, "a young, sober and strong leader", has set a target to double Russia's GDP over the next 10 years. To achieve this, the average GDP growth must be no less than 7.2 per cent per year, a figure which was attained in the first six months of this year.

The areas of co-operation and collaboration between Malaysia and Russia are numerous. Dr Mahathir and Putin have identified energy, biotechnology, prospecting and mining and space vehicles and IT, including the Multimedia

Super Corridor.

Moscow is strengthening the legislation guaranteeing the rights of investors and owners. Putin says: "We are sticking to the international standards of accounting and we are decreasing the tax burden. And this policy of the Russian leadership will continue."

Russia has emerged from its "murky" past, and with a stronger, more confident leadership, it is well on its way to reclaim its place among the "prosperous, developed, strong and respected nations".

"I believe, (Putin) can restore Russia to its position of greatness," Dr Mahathir said at the end of his visit to Russia last year. Russia has taken great steps forward. And this will result in the Russian Federation becoming a great power again and providing the necessary balance of power in international affairs.