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Putin's visit to explore new areas of co-operation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Russian president Vladimir Putin will arrive here early next month in a visit aimed at developing new areas of co-operation besides bolstering traditional ties.

Russian Ambassador to Malaysia Vladimir Morozov said several agreements would be signed in areas such as science and technology, economics, culture and education.

Putin will also hold meetings with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on bilateral issues.

"Their last meeting in Evian, France, was like that of old friends and we can expect the same this time," he said in an interview.

Dr Mahathir met Putin at the enlarged dialogue ahead of the summit of the Group of Eight where they discussed the Russian leader's visit.

The Prime Minister first met Putin at the Asia Pacific Economic Forum meeting in Brunei in 2000, while their second meeting was last March when he visited Russia.

The last high-level Russian visitor to Malaysia was former Prime Minister Evgniy Primakov who made an official visit here in 1999.

Morozov said Putin was keen to visit Malaysia to build on the commonalities between the two nations, including their stand on international issues like the invasion of Iraq and the issue of international terrorism.

"Russia and Malaysia have taken an almost identical stand of late on several international issues. We have also similar stands on globalisation and its effects on developing countries."

The envoy expected the meeting of both heads of governments to yield tangible results that will cement the 36-year-old bilateral relationship.

Morozov said both countries may also be looking at a smart partnership for the commercialisation of technologies.

"The bilateral relationship entered a new phase five years ago with greater trade and political ties being established."

On trade, he said Malaysia was Russia's largest trading partner among Asean nations, registering a bilateral trade balance of RM2.18 billion last year.

"Thus, both countries have worked hard to achieve the target of US\$500 million (RM1.9 billion) in bilateral trade that both leaders wanted when they met in Moscow last year."

He said the private sectors in both nations were considering diversifying their activities by looking at areas of investment in Malaysia like the field of biotechnology.

On scientific co-operation, he said the National Space Agency director-general Prof Datuk Dr Mazlan Othman would be visiting Moscow at the end of the month to study possible areas of co-operation in aviation and the aerospace industry.

"I hope she will visit the M.V. Lomonosov Moscow University to explore the possibility of working together on common issues of interest."

He said an understanding had also been forged between the Russian Academy of Science and its Malaysian equivalent last year on possible co-operation.