

**Putin, Abdullah vow closer ties**  
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Russian President Vladimir Putin and Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi vowed yesterday to strengthen their countries' ties, particularly in the energy sphere.

Meeting at the Kremlin, the two leaders pointed to the increased involvement in Russia of Malaysia's Petronas oil company, which last year spent 1.1 billion dollars on a stake in Russian firm Rosneft.

"Among our priorities is the development of investment cooperation, including in the fuel-energy sphere," Putin told reporters.

"Particularly important in this regard is strengthening the partnership of Gazprom and Rosneft with Malaysia's Petronas," he said, without going into details.

The two also signed a joint declaration promising, among other things, cooperation in space and technology.

The meeting came as Russia is preparing to send the first Malaysian astronaut into space aboard a Soyuz rocket.

Last September a doctor and part-time model, Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, as well as back-up astronaut Faiz Khaleed arrived in Russia to begin training for the flight.

The two sides had paid particular attention to cooperation in "fuel-energy, space, information- and communication-technology, agriculture, biotechnology and medicine," the joint declaration said.

### **Growing arms sales**

On current international disputes, the two sides "voiced disappointment that Iran has so far not positively reacted to resolutions of the United Nations" regarding its nuclear programme and "welcomed the positive dynamic" in six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme.

Russia's Kommersant newspaper meanwhile pointed to Moscow's growing arms sales to Malaysia.

Moscow hopes to secure more deals after the delivery of 18 Sukhoi 30-MKM fighter jets purchased by Kuala Lumpur for nearly one billion dollars under a deal in 2003, Kommersant said. The delivery of the first of these jets is currently under way.

Kommersant said that that deal was "far from all" and that Russia was participating in tenders to sell Malaysia a range of armoured vehicles and anti-tank rocket systems.

Moscow also hopes to sell Malaysia helicopters and a variety of air defence systems, the paper added.

"Malaysia is already a serious buyer of Russian weapons and in future could turn into one of the biggest markets" for Russian arms in Southeast Asia, Kommersant said.

## **Abdullah's honeymoon**

Meanwhile the Russian newspaper Vremya Novostei noted that Abdullah had arrived in Moscow on Monday with his new wife Jeanne Abdullah, who he married this month.

Reporting that the two were due to travel to the historic imperial capital Saint Petersburg, the newspaper described the visit as a "continuation of the 67-year-old Abdullah's honeymoon."

Earlier a Kremlin statement noted that Malaysia currently chairs the Organisation of Islamic Conference, a 57-member group of mainly Islamic states in which Russia has observer status.

Russia has sought ties with the group, reflecting its efforts to build good relations with the Islamic world and its ties with Iran and the militant Palestinian group Hamas.

Later on Tuesday, Abdullah was also to meet Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov.

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