

Abdullah's visit to strengthen ties

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's visit here beginning tomorrow is expected to take the four-decade-old diplomatic relationship between Malaysia and the Russian Federation beyond just Sukhois, Mikoyans and palm oil.

Relations between the Kremlin and Kuala Lumpur have grown over the past few years, strengthened among others by Russia's view of Malaysia as a pragmatic and progress-oriented Muslim nation.

President Vladimir Putin has visited Malaysia three times.

Abdullah's official itinerary begins tomorrow with the laying of a wreath at the Tomb of Unknown Soldiers at the Kremlin before meeting Putin and later Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov.

The leaders of both nations are expected to discuss ways to enhance diplomatic, economic and trade relations and explore other areas of mutual benefit.

Talks on enhancing co-operation in scientific and high technology areas, energy and higher education are likely to take place.

The leaders are also expected to discuss international issues such as those concerning North Korea, Iran, West Asia and also on Russia's participation in Asean and the East Asia Summit.

On Wednesday, Abdullah will be conferred the "Doctor Honoris Causa" by the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, the top diplomatic school in Russia.



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi with President Vladimir Putin (left) during Putin's visit to Kuala Lumpur in 2005.

He will also be meeting Malaysian students studying in Russian universities and later deliver a keynote speech at the Malaysia-Russia Business Forum.

There are some 2,000 Malaysian students in five universities in Russia, about 95 per cent of whom are attending medical schools.

A 200-strong delegation will also be here throughout Abdullah's visit, 80 of whom will be from the private sector.

Total trade between Russia and Malaysia has surpassed US\$1 billion (RM3.7 billion), in the latter's favour.

Malaysia exports to Russia palm oil and palm oil products, electrical and electronics equipment, furniture and rubber products.

Imports from Russia include petrochemicals, fertilisers and ma-

chinery.

There is scope to widen economic relations, especially in areas such as tourism as Russia, with a population of about 144 million, has been experiencing robust annual economic growth of between six and seven per cent in the last few years, which has translated into higher disposable incomes.

The most significant investment in Russia at present is by national oil corporation Petronas, through its large stake in Russian energy company, Rosneft.

Several ministers will also be here during the visit, including Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Jamaludin Jarjis and Information Minister Datuk Seri Zainuddin Maidin.