

Bid to improve relations

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Abdullah and Putin agree on joint commission to expedite agreements

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MOSCOW: Malaysia and Russia have agreed to set up a joint commission to expedite several agreements to improve relations and economic ties between the two countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the commission, made up of ministers from both nations, would meet annually and alternately in the two countries.

"The commission can act as a catalyst to expedite these agreements and points that we discussed at our bilateral meeting today (yesterday)," said Abdullah at a joint press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin yesterday.

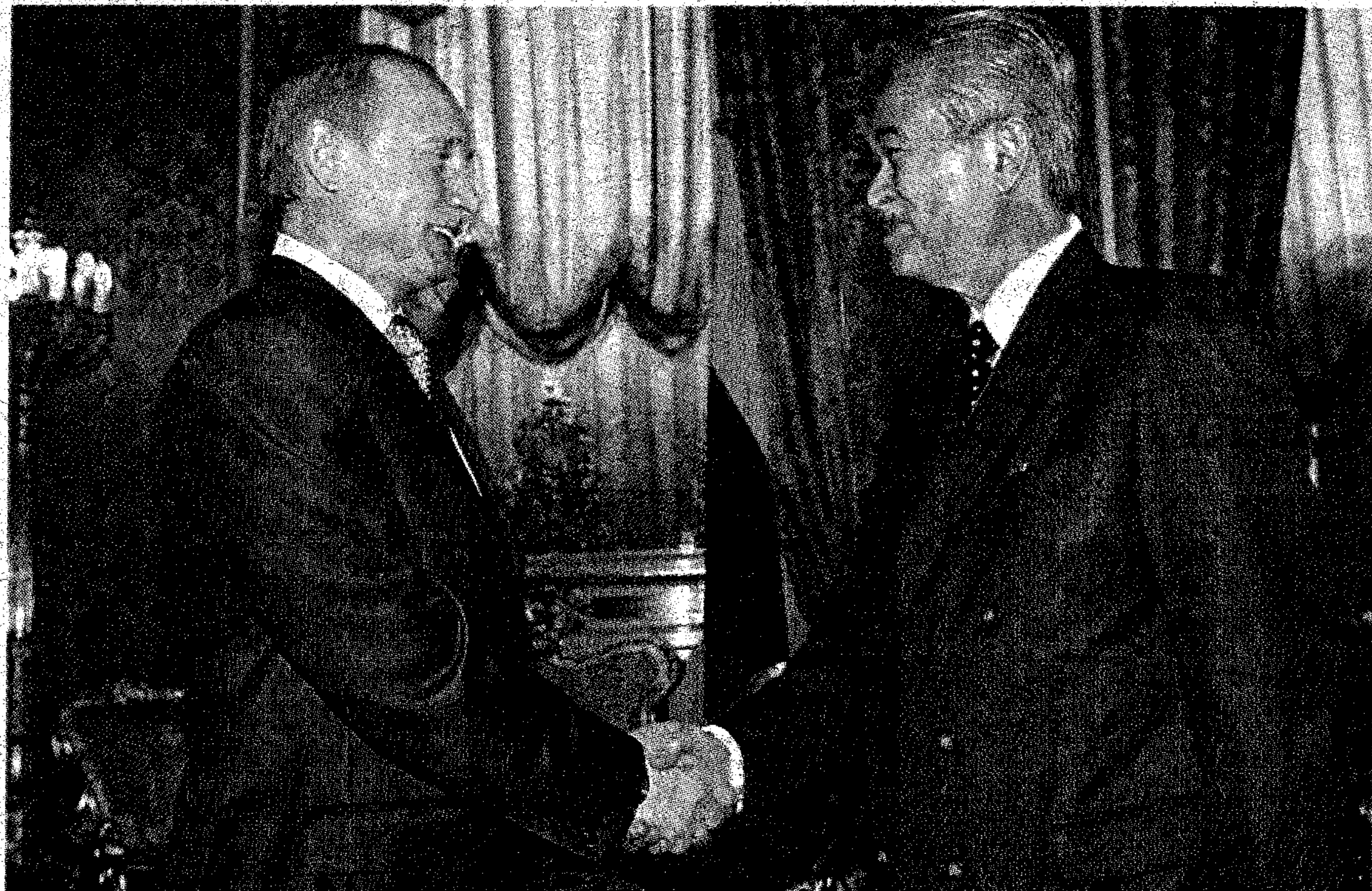
The Malaysian leader also revealed that among the agreements the two nations had agreed to sign soon were the avoidance of double taxation and protection of intellectual property.

"These agreements are important to encourage investments between Russia and Malaysia as well as to improve bilateral ties," he added.

Abdullah and Putin also talked about the good relations the two countries enjoyed with each other and that this year marked the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Russia and Malaysia.

While Abdullah noted that the relations had improved tremendously in recent years, Putin noted there were over 2,000 Malaysian students now studying in Russia.

The Malaysian Prime Minister said



Towards better ties: Putin and Abdullah seal their fruitful meeting with a handshake in Moscow yesterday.

he had also personally asked Putin to allow Malaysian athletes to train in Russia as well as give assistance for the development of sports medicine, which Russia excelled in.

Abdullah said Russia was a good partner for allowing Malaysia to participate in various fields, including space exploration and oil and gas.

Malaysia's first astronaut will blast off to the International Space Station as a member of a Russian crew in October while Petronas holds a 1.3% stake in Russian oil

giant Rosneft after its IPO earlier this year.

Putin said Malaysia was the biggest trading partner for Russia in the Asean region, with trade amounting to about US\$1.1bil last year, and was growing this year.

"The first quarter trade figures have shown a growth of over 60%," the Russian leader said.

On international affairs, both leaders said they shared common views on various matters such as the Middle East situation, Iran and Iraq.

Later, at the official banquet in his honour, Abdullah said Malaysia recognised the pivotal role Russia could play "in finding solutions to the problems and securing a permanent peace in the Middle East".

"In particular, we look towards Russia to secure the cooperation of the other members of the Quartet on the Middle East to give urgent attention to the plight and suffering of the Palestinian people, especially in view of the latest dangerous developments in Gaza," he said.