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# Najib, Putin to discuss economic ties ahead of summit

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SOCHI

**PRIME** Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is scheduled to hold a bilateral meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin today ahead of the Asean-Russia Commemorative Summit here.

Malaysian ambassador to Russia Datuk Hayati Ismail said the two leaders were expected to discuss steps to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries.

"Apart from economic partner-

ship, the meeting will touch on other areas of mutual concern," Hayati told the Malaysian media yesterday.

However, she did not elaborate.

Hayati said the meeting was important and meaningful as Malaysia and Russia would be celebrating their 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations on April 3 next year.

"It is to improve trade and intensify Malaysia's presence in Russia, and to cement the strategic partnership between the two countries following the setting up of a joint commission last year."

On Nov 21 last year, the two countries signed the Malaysia-Russia joint commission for economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation.

Hayati said the meeting would be followed by the summit's reception, hosted by Putin.

She said the two countries' total trade was US\$1.35 billion (RM5.5 billion) last year, a 51 per cent drop from 2014.

"The number of tourists from Russia dropped by 12 per cent last year to 54,263," she said, adding that the decrease in trade and number of tourists was due to economic slowdown caused by the drop in crude oil prices and currency depreciation.

In a statement on Tuesday, Putin's aide, Yuri Ushakov, said among the agenda for the meeting were closer trade and economic cooperation, implementation of investment projects in the energy sector and expansion of military technical cooperation and humanitarian ties.

Hayati said Najib would hold his first bilateral meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, who was sworn into office in

April, tomorrow.

Najib arrived here yesterday from London to lead the Malaysian delegation in the two-day summit, which begins today.

He is accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and officials from the Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Ministry.

The summit is held to commemorate 20 years of Asean-Russia dialogue relations, which serves as a platform for the leaders to chart the future direction of the partnership.

During the summit, the leaders are expected to adopt the Sochi Declaration, titled "Moving Towards a Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit".

The leaders will take note of the Comprehensive Plan of Action

(2016-2020), consisting of measures to strengthen relations over the next five years and consider the report on the Asean-Russia Eminent Persons Group.

The report contains proposals on the future direction of Asean-Russia relations.

The summit covers three sessions: the plenary session to deliberate on global and regional issues, as well as on Asean-Russia cooperation; the meeting between business representatives to discuss business opportunities between Asean and Russia; and, the working luncheon to focus on prospects for greater economic cooperation between Eurasia and Southeast Asia.

The Asean-Russia Business Forum and Asean-Russia Culture Ministers Meeting will take place at the sidelines of the summit.