

## **Malaysia, Russia to Further Enhance Bilateral Trade, Tourist Arrivals**

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**From Leslean Arshad**

SOCHI (Russia), May 19 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Russia will explore expanding business ties to provide better connectivity, including establishing direct flights and exploring a free trade agreement (FTA) deal to enhance bilateral trade and tourist arrivals.

These were matters discussed in a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Russian President Vladimir Putin held in conjunction with a two-day ASEAN-Russia Commemorative Summit beginning here Thursday.

The two leaders also agreed to a 30-minute meeting for Malaysia and Russia to discuss further action to ensure justice was achieved in the downing of the ill-fated Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in Ukraine in 2014, after the presentation of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) report.

Speaking to Malaysian reporters after the meeting with Putin, Najib said that he and the Russian President noted that Malaysia-Russia trade relations were at a satisfactory level but had yet to reach a 'commendable' level.

"So, there is vast potential for development," he said, adding that Malaysia would explore the possibility of negotiating for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in which Russia was among the leading countries.

He said the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) would hold discussions with the relevant ministries in Russia to survey the EAEU FTA negotiations.

Najib said he raised the potential of tourism to Putin as Russian tourists considered Malaysia a safe destination to visit.

To increase Russian tourists who have high purchasing power, to visit Malaysia, the prime minister said he proposed direct Kuala Lumpur-Moscow flights and an increase in the frequency of chartered flights.

He said Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and AirAsia should see opportunities in the proposed Kuala Lumpur-Moscow direct flights.

In Najib's meeting with Putin, the two leaders also agreed that Kuala Lumpur and Moscow

cooperate in dealing with violent extremism.

Also discussed in the meeting was military cooperation, with Russia expressing its willingness to supply the latest defence technology to Malaysia, including the maintenance of military aircraft.

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