

**The Official Lunch Hosted By H.E. Vladimir Vladimirovich
Putin President Of The Russian Federation**

Moscow, Russia Federation 14 March 2002

Let me first of all, thank you, Mr. President, for your warm words of welcome and the kind tribute to the government and people of Malaysia. I am indeed honoured to be here, at this gracious occasion this evening. This visit should have taken place in September last year but the tragic events of September 11 made it necessary for me to postpone my visit. I am truly glad that I have been able to undertake the visit this time. On behalf of my wife and members of my delegation, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you, Mr. President, and Madam Putin, your Government and the People of Russia, for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements extended to us since our arrival in your beautiful country.

2. I recall with fond memories my first official visit to Russia in 1986. During the APEC meeting in Shanghai in November last year, we had the opportunity to meet and discuss a wide range of issues of common interest.

3. My visit here today is to reaffirm Malaysia's commitment to this spirit of friendship and cooperation. We have had frank and fruitful discussions that will chart the future course of our relations and bring it to new heights. We should take the opportunity to explore new areas of cooperation to further enhance our relations on a broad-based, multi-faceted and mutually advantageous basis.

4. Malaysia follows with interest Russia's achievements in the field of science and technology, heavy engineering and scientific research and development. I believe there is tremendous potential for cooperation, especially in the fields of information and computer technology, aerospace industry and trade and investment. With Malaysia's experience in the market economy and established infrastructure in the commercial and industrial sector, and Russia's wealth of scientific and technological resources, I believe there is scope for creating smart partnerships. New areas of cooperation, could include education, culture and tourism. We should try and keep our relationship multifaceted so that we can maximise the advantages to our mutual benefit.

5. I am happy to note the positive trend in trade and economic cooperation between our two countries during the last few years. At the same time, I believe much more needs to be done if we are to realise the full potential of our trade. Currently, bilateral trade between our two countries stands at approximately USD 300 million a year and it has

always been in Russia's favour. This amount, you will agree, is very small given the size of the Russian market potential.

6. The private sector of both our countries must be encouraged to explore a whole new range of products and establish mutually profitable linkages. Our chambers of commerce should play a more active role to promote and assist our exporters and importers in identifying and sourcing for these products. It would be mutually beneficial if our exporters and importers could explore ways to engage in direct trading rather than buying and selling their products through third countries. As business relations grow, our private sectors should also prepare themselves towards forming strategic alliances with a view to maximising each other's comparative advantage.

7. Our private sectors should look beyond their borders, to the economically dynamic and vibrant region of East Asia and Central Asia. Malaysia has envisaged plans to extend its economic reach to the East and Central Asian region through railway connections with China. This will pave the way for greater inter-changeability of goods and technology amongst countries in the region, with Russia being an integral part of it. The prospects appear to be even better with the eventual creation of an eastern corridor that will link Southeast Asia with East Asia. The ensuing economic growth will in turn bring about a more stable and peaceful international security environment in the region.

8. We would like to express our appreciation to Russia, as a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, for its dynamic role in the ASEAN Regional Forum, Post Ministerial Conference and the ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee. These meetings offer opportunities for Russia and ASEAN, at ministerial and official level, to review contemporary political, security, economic and development cooperation issues affecting the two sides.

9. At the international level, Malaysia and Russia share many similar views. Malaysia values Russia's role in promoting international peace and stability. Today the threat to international peace and stability comes from terrorism. Malaysia has been consistent in its policy of opposing all forms of terrorism. Such acts of terror must be condemned. But we feel strongly that terrorism should not be identified with any particular group of people or religion. That is why Malaysia is of the opinion that an international conference to discuss all aspects of terrorism is vitally necessary. Such a conference would enable us to define terrorism so that all such acts can be immediately recognised and condemned.

10. With that Mr. President, I would like once again to reiterate my sincere gratitude for the warm reception and hospitality extended to my wife and I, and to members of my delegation. I do hope Mr. President that you would allow me to reciprocate your kindness when you visit Malaysia in the near future.