

EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS: THE FUTURE OF MALAYSIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to President Vladimir Putin for inviting me to this pre-eminent and momentous forum, here in Vladivostok.
2. It is also momentous for me on a personal level because, believe it or not, this is my very first visit to Russia. More than 50 years ago, when I was still an 'active' youth leader, I flew Aeroflot and transited Moscow Airport on my way to Liège, Belgium, for the Annual Youth Conference. We were allowed to disembark only to the transit hotel. So, I never got the chance to set foot on Russian soil!

3. Therefore, it is a double honour and privilege, finally, to be in Vladivostok, where history blends seamlessly with progress and where the vastness of Russia meets the boundless promise of the Asia Pacific. As a crossroads of commerce, this city has been shaped by diverse influences, reflecting a rich heritage of Russian and East Asian traditions, making Vladivostok a concert of cultures.
4. Beyond its economic significance, Vladivostok holds a distinctive place in Russian history as a vital seaport and the eastern terminus of the legendary Trans-Siberian Railway. This city truly embodies Russia's connections with the East.
5. Here, we find a powerful symbol of our gathering – a convergence of geography, ideas, aspirations and futures. Since its inception in 2015, the Eastern Economic Forum has consistently drawn visionaries and leaders from around the world. This is fitting, as Northeast Asia – which includes the Russian Far East – is a region of vibrant economic dynamism and immense potential.
6. Indeed, it contributes about a fifth of the world's GDP. I would therefore like to thank President Putin for his vision and leadership in establishing this forum, which continues to foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. Russia is not just a strategic and economic reality that commands attention. Indeed, as a cultural, intellectual, and scientific force, Russia's prominence on the global stage transcends the confines of commerce and geopolitics, reaching deep into the very fabric of human history and thought.
8. Russia's pre-eminence stems not from military might or economic leverage, crucial as that may be, but from the enduring power of ideas, the beauty of artistic expression, and an unwavering pursuit of knowledge.
9. These achievements form the bedrock of its remarkable soft power, earning Russia a place of global respect and admiration, influencing the hearts and minds of people around the world.
10. For me, personally, this influence is most powerfully felt in literature. I say this with earnest conviction because, having drunk deeply from the wellsprings of English and Malay literature in my early education, and then later having immersed myself in the works of Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton, I do believe that life would be so much poorer without literature.

11. In this regard, I can't sing enough praises of the great Russian authors and poets who have explored the profound complexities of life with unparalleled insight, and whose works have had a lasting impact on my own understanding of society and the human condition.
12. For instance, the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, just to name a few, delve into the moral and philosophical dilemmas that define what it means to be human.
13. While Dostoevsky challenges us to engage with the intricacies of faith, doubt, and the human soul, Tolstoy invites us to reflect on the nature of power, responsibility, and the passage of time. Transcending the literary significance, the appreciation of Russian literature manifests the depth of this great nation's impact on global thought and its capacity to inform our understanding of our own roles within the broader currents of history.
14. Furthermore, the appeal and power of Russian literature extends beyond its philosophical underpinnings. Writers like Chekhov, Pushkin, Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn have brought to life the joys, sorrows, and struggles of everyday existence with a realism that has resonated with me deeply.

15. For example, during my years of incarceration, I found myself returning every now and then to the pages of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, who is sentenced to ten years of imprisonment in a labour camp. Well, while my time in prison was not served in any concentration camp, nevertheless, ten years of solitary confinement isn't exactly a bed of roses!

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. In its pivotal role in advancing human knowledge through science and technology, Russia has consistently pushed the boundaries of possibility, from pioneering efforts in space exploration to ground-breaking work in nuclear physics and cybernetics.
17. These contributions reflect a deep-seated commitment to understanding and mastering the natural world, underscoring Russia's importance in the collective progress of humanity.
18. We are witnessing a troubling trend of protectionism that threatens to fragment the global economy. The rise of tariffs, trade barriers, and restrictions on technological exchange constitute troubling developments.

19. While these measures may sometimes be justified by the need to protect domestic industries and intellectual property, there must be a limit to how far the walls of protectionism can be erected. The benefits of globalisation, despite its flaws, have been profound, lifting millions out of poverty and fostering unprecedented economic growth.
20. In this regard, the rise of the Global South does not signify merely a shift in economic power but a reconfiguration of global influence. Encompassing countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the Global South is on a trajectory to play a pivotal role in reshaping the future of the world economy.
21. According to recent estimates, the Global South now accounts for roughly 40 per cent of the world's economic output and is home to about 85 per cent of the global population. By 2030, it is projected that three of the four largest economies will be from the Global South.
22. This rise is a reality that presents both challenges and opportunities. For Malaysia, it is essential that we build strong ties to share in the growth and to contribute to a more balanced global order. Like Russia, we see the potential in these developing economies, and we are committed to fostering partnerships that can drive mutual prosperity.

23. In this vein, Malaysia is actively pursuing opportunities within the Global South, and joining fellow nations that seek to create a new paradigm of development – one that is more inclusive, equitable, sustainable and resilient.
24. In a world of increasing complexity, our future prosperity depends on our ability to adapt, innovate and build relationships that cut across traditional boundaries. The Global South is rising, and Malaysia intends to rise with it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. Being an open economy, Malaysia prides itself on doing business with the entire world, and we have benefitted greatly from being a vital node in globalised supply chains.
26. Central to this effort is the MADANI Economic framework, which has implemented structural reform initiatives to trailblaze a more sustainable, inclusive future path for our nation.
27. In Malaysia-Russia bilateral relations, one area ripe for collaboration is Islamic finance where Malaysia is regarded as a global leader, boasting a robust ecosystem of institutions that not only adhere to Shariah principles but also drive innovation in financial instruments.

28. Russia, with its sizeable Muslim population, stands at the threshold of enormous potential in Islamic finance, and I believe the introduction of Islamic banking in Russia can facilitate joint projects and attract significant investments from Muslim-majority nations.
29. In agriculture, Russia has made remarkable strides, becoming a significant global player in this sector. As one of the world's largest grain producers and exporters, Russia plays a crucial role in ensuring global food security. Russia's agricultural exports have been instrumental in stabilising global markets amid ongoing supply chain disruptions.
30. Turning to education and research, Russia has a long-standing reputation for excellence, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Russian universities have consistently ranked among the best globally, producing world-class scientists, engineers, and researchers.
31. The recent establishment of the Russian-Malaysian High-Tech Centre (RMHTC) in Malaysia underscores our commitment to fostering technological innovation and academic excellence.

32. In facilitating cooperation in developing high-tech solutions, particularly in energy efficiency, data transmission, and smart city technologies we can harness our collective strengths to drive innovation and address the challenges of the 21st century.
33. Additionally, the strive for cutting edge advancements such as AI and semiconductor technologies should be guided by humanistic and altruistic values, to ensure that tech rivalry and inequity do not result in the hindrance of free trade, and a more fragmented geopolitical landscape.

Ladies and gentlemen,

34. As upcoming ASEAN Chair, Malaysia will not only focus on strengthening existing ASEAN mechanisms and institutions, but also find synergies with other regions and key dialogue partners to foster development and prosperity.
35. In forging ahead with this approach, of utmost priority will be the need to reinforce the paramount principle of ASEAN centrality which constitutes the lynchpin for consensus building that in turn binds member states in cohesiveness of action.

36. Malaysia will also intensify engagement with other sub-regions and leveraging ties with our strategic partners, including Russia. In this context, the ASEAN-Russia partnership is crucial in fostering economic growth, security cooperation, and cultural exchange across the region.
37. In light of this, in applying to join BRICS, Malaysia aims to diversify our economic diplomacy efforts and enhance collaboration with member countries through shared initiatives and strategic partnerships.
38. I would like to take a moment to express my profound thanks and gratitude to President Putin for his gracious invitation for me to attend the forthcoming BRICS Summit in Kazan, in October. This invitation marks a major step towards our ultimate goal of joining the grouping.
39. We are entering an era marked by intense superpower rivalry, significant global economic upheavals, as well as trade and technology as 'tools' to consolidate power bases, against the growing, existential threat of climate change.
40. Together, we should continue to cooperate, speak in a unified voice and exchange ideas on strategy and best policy practices to build a future of even greater peace and prosperity in Asia and the world.

41. As we chart the path forward together, let us remember that the true strength of our partnership lies not only in the agreements we sign or the projects that we jointly undertake but in the shared vision and mutual respect that bind our nations.

Thank you.
