PM Lee meets Russian PM Medvedev, hopes to see cultural centre, trade pact, in two years

PM Lee Hsien Loong on Singapore-Russian relations

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MOSCOW - Singapore hopes a Russian Cultural Centre will open in the Republic in two years' time, when it
Had productive discussions with PM Дмитрий Медведев (Dmitry Medvedev) today. We took stock of our good relations and discussed how to do more together.

My father believed that Russia would play a major role in world affairs. He first visited in 1970 and eventually came more than five times. Even after he retired as PM, he kept the links up. He served on the board of the SKOLKOVO - Moscow School of Management. He also was a keen supporter of the Russia-Singapore Business Forum...

Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew made his first visit to Russia in 1970, and would return many more times.
"My father, (then) Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, believed that Russia would play a major role in world affairs, so when I was a teenager he encouraged me to study Russian, which I did," said Mr Lee.

"Even after he retired as Prime Minister he kept the links up, he took an interest in the Skolkovo Moscow School of Management (and) became its board member."

The late Mr Lee was also a keen supporter of the Russia-Singapore Business Forum, which helps connect business leaders and broaden economic cooperation between both sides, he added.

PM Lee recounted that his first visit to Russia was as a student in 1972, when he spent several weeks in Moscow and Leningrad, today's St Petersburg. He returned again six years later for his honeymoon.

"I am happy to be able to continue building on this foundation, and taking our relationship another step forward," he said, calling his visit "long overdue for me personally and a significant milestone for bilateral ties."

Singapore's signing on Wednesday of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) - the regulatory body of the EAEU - will hopefully pave the way for a feasibility study and negotiations on the FTA, said PM Lee.

But ties with Russia go beyond just economics, he added. Cultural ties are strong, while Singapore universities have deep partnerships with Russian institutions.
A busy day in Moscow. Very pleased that we have signed an MOU to deepen interaction with the Eurasian Economic Commission, which oversees the economic union of five countries - Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. This will help us learn about each other, find new areas for cooperation, and hopefully lead eventually to a Free Trade Agreement with them.

Also met the Mayor of Moscow, Sergey Sobyanin, who has ambitious plans for the city. We discussed business and investment opportunities in Moscow and how Singapore firms can participate more in this.

At lunch and dinner I was hosted by two old Russian friends of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Learnt much about developments in the region from my fellow Russian guests. – LHL

Yesterday, two more MOUs were signed.

One was between the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Russian counterpart to strengthen cultural relations.
Minister Grace Fu hoped it would also see more Russian arts and culture programmes in the Asean region.

The other MOU is between Nanyang Technological University and the Russian Academy of Sciences to explore developing products and taking them to market.

Prime Minister Medvedev said it is a good sign that trade between Singapore and Russia has grown substantially - almost quadrupling in the last decade - and that "almost every important area of economic cooperation is in our focus".

"(We are) interested in good dialogue with Singapore, a country with great achievements," Mr Medvedev said in Russian. "And the models used by Singapore in government and business management are also in demand, and of interest to our country."

Mr Lee invited Mr Medvedev to visit Singapore again.

He noted that the Russian Prime Minister's 2009 visit was very fruitful, as it resulted in the setting up of the high-level Russia-Singapore Inter-Governmental Commission.

The commission led to both sides agreeing to start the process to negotiate a comprehensive FTA between Singapore and the EAEU.

Mr Lee said the visit also "geared up cooperation in many areas: culture, education, healthcare, agriculture, legal cooperation".

"And it continues to expand in scope into governance and counterterrorism. So the next time PM (Medvedev) comes, I hope we'll be able to do even more," Mr Lee added.

Mr Lee flies today to Sochi, where he will meet President Vladimir Putin.

He will also attend a summit of Asean leaders and Mr Putin today, to mark 20 years of ties between Asean and Russia.

**Correction note:** An earlier version of the story said Minister Fu signed an MOU. Ms Fu spoke about the MOU, but the MOU was signed by Singapore Ambassador to Russia Lim Kheng Hua and Russia's deputy culture minister Alla Manilova. We are sorry for the error.