

OPPORTUNITY **Russia**

RUSSIA - SINGAPORE A VIBRANT CULTURAL KALEIDOSCOPE



■ **New Russian Cultural
Centre to Boost Activities
in Art, Culture and
Education**

■ **Successful Investments
in the Fight Against
COVID-19**

■ **Ambassador
Andrey Tatarinov
on Positive Trends
and Optimistic
Outlook When
COVID-19 Ends**



Best wishes for Russia on National Day!



SGX Mainboard-listed Food Empire Holdings (Food Empire) is a global branding and manufacturing company in the food and beverage sector. Its products include instant beverage products, frozen convenience food, confectionery and snack food.

Food Empire's products are exported to over 50 countries, in markets such as Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, China, Indochina, the Middle East, Mongolia and the US. The Group has 23 offices (representative and liaison) worldwide. The Group operates 7 manufacturing facilities in Malaysia, India, Vietnam, Russia and Ukraine.

Food Empire's products include a wide variety of beverages, such as regular and flavoured coffee mixes and cappuccinos, chocolate drinks and flavoured fruit teas. It also markets instant breakfast cereal, potato crisps and assorted frozen convenience foods.

Food Empire's strength lies in its proprietary brands – including MacCoffee, Petrovskaya Sloboda, Klassno, Hyson, OrienBites and Kracks. MacCoffee – the Group's flagship brand – has been consistently ranked as the leading 3-in-1 instant coffee brand in the Group's core market of Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The Group employs sophisticated brand building activities, localised to match the flavour of the local markets in which its products are sold.

Since its public listing in 2000, Food Empire has won numerous accolades and awards including being recognised as one of the "Most Valuable Singapore Brands" by IE Singapore (now known as Enterprise Singapore), while MacCoffee has been ranked as one of "The Strongest Singapore Brands". Forbes Magazine has twice named Food Empire as one of the "Best under a Billion" companies in Asia and the company has also been awarded one of Asia's "Top Brand" by Influential Brands.

For more information, please refer to: <http://www.foodempire.com>

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RUSSIA and SINGAPORE Ties: **Positive Trends and Optimistic** **Outlook When COVID-19 Ends**

H.E. Andrey Tatarinov the Ambassador of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Singapore was interviewed by Editor-in-Chief Nomita Dhar on the current 'extraordinary' situation with COVID-19 and highlights of Russia and Singapore bilateral ties during his five-year term here

Your Excellency, 2020 is turning out to be a very special year. I have interviewed you many times in the past but this is the first time we are meeting under these very special circumstances as the whole world has almost come to a standstill and humanity is trying to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. What do you feel about this?

It is an extraordinary situation. There was something similar about 100 years ago called the Spanish Flu (influenza). It took millions of lives and it seemed something like that could not be possible in the 21st century. But here we are in the midst of another pandemic. The whole world is engulfed in the 'flames' of COVID-19. I can't leave Singapore and fly to Moscow as airports and borders are closed. And I feel as if globalization has come to a halt!

I've been watching the situation very closely, sending reports to my government about the situation in Singapore; about the measures the government here is taking to combat COVID-19 and how it is mitigating the economic consequences of this pandemic. I hope that joint efforts between both our countries will contribute to bringing this 'thriller' story to a happy ending.

Apart from travel, how else has it impacted your diplomatic work? Other embassies have had to repatriate many of their citizens and was that the case with you as well?

It is not a secret that COVID-19 pandemic and various restrictions imposed by the governments of almost all countries dramatically affected many spheres of life including the world's air connections. As the situation developed, those Russian citizens, who remained in Singapore at the end of March, realized that they were not able to get back home as their flights, including connecting flights, were cancelled.

We did our best to provide them with all possible assistance. The Consular section of the Embassy remained open (with all precautionary measures taken, of course)

even during the Circuit Breaker period. The diplomats helped our tourists, including those who were in Singapore in transit, to get on board special repatriation flights organized by the Russian Government from those international hubs, where it was possible. Those, who required financial support, received it from the Government.

As of today, we have repatriated as many people as we could, and the work is ongoing.





(Left): The Russian Defense Ministry and Gamalei National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology have begun clinical trials of a vaccine against the novel coronavirus on 16th June 2020. The trials are expected to take about one and a half months
(Photo © Yegor Aleyev / TASS)

On the subject of medical and health diplomacy, what are the areas of collaboration between Russia and Singapore?

Russia has sent humanitarian aid to many countries. Italy was one of the first as it was hit by the pandemic badly and it was followed by several CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) member states. We've also provided humanitarian assistance to Laos and Cambodia, which included personal protective gear, and medicine. We also have a framework for collaboration with ASEAN.

Four years ago, in Sochi, a comprehensive plan of action to promote cooperation between ASEAN and Russia was adopted at the commemorative Russia-ASEAN summit. A major part of this document included a section titled "Help in Pandemic Preparedness and Response". The objective was to work together to enhance our preparedness and capacity in responding to communicable and emerging infectious diseases, including pandemics, other potential public health and biological threats. Preparedness, prevention, control measures and capacity building would include among others, the strengthening of areas on surveillance, laboratory

TRAVEL ADVISORIES

In view of the COVID-19 situation travellers should be prepared for further travel restrictions to be put in effect with little or no advance notice. Please visit the following websites for the latest information:

FOR RUSSIAN CITIZENS

<https://www.rosputrebnadzor.ru/about/info/news/>

FOR SINGAPOREANS

<https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Countries-Regions/R/Russian-Federation/Travel-Page>

"Four years ago, in Sochi, a comprehensive plan of action to promote cooperation between ASEAN and Russia was adopted at the commemorative Russia-ASEAN Summit. A major part of this document included a section titled "Help in Pandemic Preparedness and Response". The objective was to work together to enhance our preparedness and capacity in responding to communicable and emerging infectious diseases, including pandemics, other potential public health and biological threats"

How well has Russia handled the crisis so far?

I'd say that Russia has been handling the crisis well. Due to timely preparation work that started from the very beginning of January after the WHO and the Chinese government informed us about the outbreak. We started necessary preparations and measures were taken in the large Russian cities and surrounding regions. After the first two cases in Russia were registered at the end of January (both were Chinese nationals) we did not have a single case for months and it gave us time to prepare the hospitals, the ICU facilities and medical staff. That enabled us to react well, although initially we did not feel so optimistic as there were more than 200,000 Russians abroad, and they were in the midst of returning to Russia!

We had a big flow of imported cases. There were about 240,000 people who returned to Russia, and at least 120,000 of them were in transit at Moscow, so the city rapidly became the largest cluster in Russia. And for a month or so, up to 60% of infected cases were concentrated in Moscow. Then

the epidemic went to the regions. Moscow began this fight earlier than other places and we have succeeded. Now the rate of growth for infection is very low, less than 2%, which enabled us to now start opening the country. And, of course, we learn from the experience of other countries, including Singapore. We share many similar measures to fight the spread. However, given the size of the country and population of Russia at 146 million, it will take time.

We see some positive trends today and in an optimistic scenario, we hope by the end of July to be able to return to a 'new normal'. Of course, it is understood that until we have an effective vaccine and treatment therapy we will have to follow the mask wearing regime; wearing gloves when shopping or taking public transport etc. These measures will all be the new normal in Russia.

Russia currently has civil and military research institutes working on the vaccine and some are already undergoing clinical testing, so I think that a vaccine is possible by the end of the year.



A major diplomatic highlight in Russia-Singapore relations. President Putin was in Singapore for a State visit in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2018

networking, human resource capacities and information sharing. This was confirmed in our statement in the Russia-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, adopted in Singapore in 2018. And following this arrangement last year, we have tabled similar initiatives for the next East Asia Summit too. Last year, the first group of ASEAN experts underwent training in Vladivostok. We are prepared to receive more experts from the ASEAN countries to work together. We have done this because we understand that such infectious diseases will be with us for a long time.

There have been other initiatives too. During their co-chairmanship in ADMM-Plus Expert's Working Group on Military Medicine (2014-2016), Russia and Thailand initiated the establishment of the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM) in Bangkok to enhance coordination and cooperation among the Military Medical Services of the ASEAN Member States and Plus Countries. Today, the ACMM facilities, if necessary, can also be used to fight COVID-19. So we have a deep engagement with many countries in the field of public health and combating infectious diseases. (See accompanying box story – *Pandemic Preparedness and Response*)

As we near the end of your term as Ambassador in Singapore, we note that you have had a very colourful and busy tenure here. For example, we witnessed

the first time the Russian President's visit to the Republic. What are the other highlights for you during your posting in Singapore?

This morning, I went through several past issues of your *IN Diplomacy* publications, which helped to remind me about our Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2018, and President Putin's visit among other events. Time flies, and looking back I see how my tenure was very busy and I believe successful in terms of developing relations, friendships and cooperation between Russia and Singapore in many fields. I have mentioned the commemorative Russia-ASEAN Summit in Sochi 2016, and on this occasion, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's working visit to Russia where he met President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev.

In 2018, President Putin was in Singapore for a State visit in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. And, of course, I was happy to see our top leaders meet. And besides that, there were many, many visits and interactions between Russia and Singapore. Many members of the Singapore government visited Russia on different occasions, be it the sessions of intergovernmental commission, co-chaired by Deputy Prime Ministers of Russia and Singapore, or at other international fora held in Russia.

Pandemic Preparedness and Response

"Russia has a huge experience in mitigation of outbreaks of infectious diseases, like smallpox, anthrax etc. Because of this, our health experts are well-prepared and equipped with a wide range of quarantine and sanitary tools as well as with the curing schemes.

We are open to any cooperation with the countries all over the world and are ready to share the knowledge, experience and best practices in case the other side is interested. The position of the Russian Government is to extend help to whatever extent possible to every country which is in need of it.

Russia provides assistance in different spheres (from test-kits to large-scale medical operations, involving military health personal, providing of laboratories, disinfection equipment etc, like it has been done in Italy and Serbia) to some countries, including China, the USA, and to our partners within the EAEU and CIS.

We examine closely every request of assistance from abroad. Now we are looking into ones from Algeria, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, Libya, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan and Tunisia. We are also working closely with the WHO, providing financial support to this Geneva-based UN body. Russia has recently donated US\$1 million to enhance WHO field operations in Central Asia, especially in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

In Southeast Asia, Russia is now providing some assistance to Indonesia, including medical supplies and consultations on care strategy for COVID-19 patients. We are also ready in case any other ASEAN Member State (including Singapore) requests Russian aid.

We are open to cooperation with ASEAN as one of Russia's strategic partners. In October 2019 Russia had already conducted one round of training for ASEAN experts on

infectious diseases and is looking forward to continue such practices, now with emphasis on COVID-19.

Russia as a member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) is actively pushing the topic on cooperation in epidemics prevention. Two Senior Officials Meetings have already taken place in Moscow in 2017 and the other in Bangkok in 2019. As a follow-up of these activities Russia has also proposed (with the support from China and Indonesia) a draft EAS Leaders' Statement on Strengthening Collective Capacity in Epidemics Prevention and Response that we hope will be adopted by the 15th EAS later this year. The document will focus predominantly on capacity building of national health systems and sanitary agencies, as well as sharing best practices. Russia has also invited ASEAN Member States to the high-level dialogue on the COVID-19 topic, which we expect to start in the near future."

Another area I wish to emphasise on is that we have established a very good and very productive dialogue on security issues. We had two rounds of dialogue on this subject held in Singapore in 2016 and 2019, when the Secretary of our Security Council, General Patrushev visited Singapore and met the Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister, Teo Chee Hean, and last October, when Minister Teo also visited Russia and had meetings at the Security Council and other agencies of the Russian Federation engaged in security issues. We had also started a dialogue on cyber security. Two rounds of these dialogues took place on the sidelines at the International Singapore Cyber Week, and I hope this will continue.

Our military relations are on a very positive track. In April 2016 Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen participated in the V Moscow Conference on International Security. Subsequently the Senior Minister of State for Defence Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman and also Senior Minister of State for Defence Heng Chee How made visits to Moscow on similar occasions. Russia participates in the Shangri La Dialogue meetings regularly, which also enable us to have bilateral meetings on the sidelines at the Dialogue. Russian Minister of Defense, General Shoygu visited Singapore for the ADMM-Plus meeting in October 2018. Dialogue on security issues and military-to-military links are very important, and I hope that regular visits of Russian Navy ships to Singapore in recent years will be followed someday by visits to Russia's Far East by the Singaporean navy!

There have been so many events. Each of them is a highlight. One of the most

significant is the laying of the foundation stone for the Russian Cultural Center. I hope that by the end of this year or early next year at the latest, the construction work will begin. It's very important because this cultural center will bring new opportunities for the people-to-people contacts between Russia and Singapore. It will enable us to promote the Russian language and culture. I think it will become a very popular place with many Singaporeans who have a growing interest in many things Russian.

You have seen Singapore at very close quarters in the last five years. What's your biggest impression of the island?

I arrived in Singapore on the 7th of April 2015. It has been a long, long time but sometimes I feel that I have just arrived! I spent four years in New Zealand in my previous assignment and those four years seemed to last longer. Here it's been five years, but it feels like one year!

Speaking of previous assignments, many might not know that you speak Vietnamese!

Yes, I spent many years in Vietnam in different capacities. During my tenure here, I am still happy to have an opportunity to visit Vietnam from Singapore whenever I can. Vietnam is a different story but in the context of COVID-19 I was there when SARS hit Asia. Altogether it's been more than 14 years.

My wife and I enjoy being in Singapore. It's a very nice, vibrant place with friendly people, with beautiful landscapes and with a lot of opportunities in terms of cultural life, concerts and exhibitions. And we have many friends in Singapore. Of course, we



Upcoming Russian Cultural Centre poised to contribute greatly to promotion of Russian culture and language. President Putin and President Halimah Yacob unveiling the foundation stone in Singapore in 2018



There have been many interactions between Russia and Singapore. (Above): Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Social and Family Development, Sam Tan was in Russia last October to attend the 8th International Meeting of Representatives of Member States of the Arctic Council, Observer States of the Arctic Council and Foreign Scientific Community



There have been many bilateral working visits. (Above left) Secretary of the National Security Council of the Russian Federation Nikolai Patrushev meets Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean in Singapore last August tackling common challenges such as terrorism, cybersecurity and transnational crime. (Above right): In October 2019 meeting in Moscow between Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Maxim Akimov to discuss collaboration in the digital and innovation sectors (Photos: Singapore MCI)



(Top): The Russian performers are one of this year's Chingay crowd favourites. (Photo: Michael Ozaki)

(Above): On 3rd February 2020 diplomats of the Russian Embassy in Singapore met with the young performers of The Rovesniki Choreographic Ensemble from Blagoveschensk (Amur Region of Russia), who took part – for the fourth time in the last few years – in the annual Chingay Parade held in Singapore on 31st January to 1st February 2020. Minister-Counsellor of the Embassy Ms Olga Kharlamova extended warm words of appreciation to the talented dancers for the outstanding performance at the Parade, admitted their significant contribution to the development of cultural cooperation with Singapore and wished them further success

will miss them. Moscow is different. In terms of population, it has more than 12 million people – that's two and a half times more than Singapore. There are many things which cannot be replicated given the nature and the size of these cities, but we should take the opportunity to learn from each other. Moscow and Singapore have close relations including cultural links. In 2016 we even had the Moscow Cultural Festival in Singapore. The COVID-19 crisis though has affected plans in the short term. Russia did manage to participate in the Chingay Parade. We have participated for the last four years and it has become one of the crowd favourites in Singapore's largest street festival.

Last November, we held a Moscow business session in Singapore which attracted a good turnout with about 100 people attending. The delegation included participants from Moscow's construction and public transport sectors. So we learnt from Singapore's experience as well as shared our experiences in these areas. We have gone further than Singapore in some areas and learnt from Singapore in other areas.

So in which areas do you think there will be opportunities for better cooperation?

I think public transport is a good area of cooperation between Singapore and Moscow and also St Petersburg. After President Putin's visit here, there was an agreement signed with St Petersburg to look into Smart Urban Transport systems. They have problems in terms of traffic congestion and want to learn from Singapore. The other areas for closer cooperation are in the education and cultural sectors. Generally, there are many areas where we have common interests and good understanding. I think that after the pandemic, we will move faster in developing them with greater exchanges between Singapore and Moscow. We have to change our plans to adjust to the new situation.

Every country's supply chain for the movement of goods is of great significance during these difficult times. How has it affected Russia, a country with huge internal resources, and its exports? Are there any new initiatives for procurement between Singapore and Russia right now?

We do not face any problems in terms of food security and agriculture is not a critical

issue in Russia; for example, we are the world's largest wheat exporter. But of course, we are interested in increasing our trade with Singapore in the areas of food and products. Presently bilateral trade is mostly related to energy – oil and liquefied natural gas will be increasing. But we can play our role in securing food supplies to Singapore. Trade opportunities in foodstuffs have already been started several years ago, and our countries exchanged several teams of experts to inspect the food production lines in Moscow. There is interest in buying Russian meat and we are interested in buying seafood from Singapore. So I think after the pandemic we will start seeing more Russian products on Singapore's supermarket shelves, much more than what can be seen today. And maybe more caviar supplied by the Russian Caviar House in Singapore!

What are your future plans after Singapore?

I'm sad to inform you that I will retire after going back to Moscow, after a long, long diplomatic career, having been in the service for 47 years. I have spent almost 30 years in the Asia Pacific altogether now, 14 years in Vietnam, five years in Thailand and four years in New Zealand.

That sounds as if you're more Asian than Russian!

I feel that too. I sometimes feel more comfortable in Asian countries, and I have many good Asian friends and, of course, I will miss them.

My plans are to spend more time with my family. My first and only grandson turned four years old in this June and my family needs me. The older generation, my mother who is 93 and mother-in-law who is 90, need our attention and care. And maybe I will write my memoirs about my life in Asia.

You have a very successful long marriage and your wife has been with you throughout these postings. In your opinion how easy has it been for her to be a diplomat's wife?

Being a diplomat's wife is a very difficult job, and my wife has done a lot to support me in all my endeavours, to be hostess of many events, to promote the image of

“Diplomats’ wives have to sacrifice their own careers for family life and their husbands’ dreams. It is difficult to overstate the contribution of my wife, Natalia, to my success, to the success of my missions in different countries.”

Russia and of Russian women. Diplomats’ wives have to sacrifice their own careers for family life and their husbands’ dreams. It is difficult to overstate the contribution of my wife, Natalia, to my success, to the success of my missions in different countries. We have been married for 38 years, and she has always shared the hardships, ups and downs of a diplomat’s life. There have been many concerns, success, joy and grief. Thank you very much for touching upon this issue, I value her contribution, and I hope she will play her part in writing my memoirs too!

You are a seasoned diplomat who has lived through the period when the country was the USSR. Now things have changed. How has diplomacy changed over the years? What is your advice to new diplomats and what do you think they should do to make the most of their careers?

Of course, diplomacy in the 21st century is different from 20 years ago. Russian diplomacy today is different. For example, it gives more opportunities to young people in terms of honing their skills from a younger age. In my time, there were certain things that I was allowed to do only after much experience and promotion up the diplomatic ladder to the rank of a First Secretary or

Counsellor. Today younger people have more opportunities in terms of showing their initiatives, being ‘loud’ - not keeping ideas to themselves. My younger colleagues may come to me at any time to voice what they think we have to do in this or that area. Before juniors were not recommended to run too fast, but times have changed. Now we appreciate the initiative from the young people, and we trust them more. It’s no longer that only seniors have a right to speak aloud.

You know looking back, much has begun to change after Gorbachev came into power in 1985. We became less conservative, more advanced looking. The Russia of today is a very different country compared to the Soviet Union. Today I am grateful that I as well as younger Russian diplomats are given more freedom in our work and have more opportunities to promote the interests of our country, which is good. But, of course, the experience and expertise of the older generation are also indispensable. This is why I always try to share my experience with my colleagues on some specific issues and different situations. I wish sometimes I was younger, but I do not regret anything. I have lived through a very interesting and challenging period of history.



(Above): On a personal note, more than deserving of a heartfelt tribute: Mrs Natalia Tatarinov - wife of 38 years

(Below): Interviewer Ms Nomita Dhar, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Opportunity Russia: “The Ambassador was very relaxed and composed in rounding up the story of Russia-Singapore ties during his posting here.”



Ambassador Tatarinov on Russia-Singapore Trade

The Ambassador goes into greater detail about Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and Free Trade Agreement (FTA) potential as well as cooperation between Russia and Singapore trade bodies



The EAEU, the Russian-led economic alliance of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, signed a Free Trade Agreement with Singapore during the annual summit of the Supreme Eurasian Council in Yerevan, Armenia in October 2019. Singapore is the EAEU's first partner in a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement

How satisfied are you with the level of engagement between Russia and Singapore in trade and FDI?

We have been fairly satisfied with the figures of bilateral trade over the last few years as Singapore remains the leading partner of Russia in South-East Asia with the trade turnover as of US\$5.3 billion in 2019. Many Russian MNCs conduct operations from Singapore - to name a few: Lukoil, Gazprom, Novatek, Rosneft, Phosagro, Eurokhim, Rusal and Rosatom. However, given the current structure of trade that relies heavily on oil products, we are exploring new niches for trade. There are two areas that we are concentrating on.

Firstly, we are aware of Singapore's demand for best-in-line technological solutions for smart cities, urban management, medical devices, energy-saving systems and keenness to bring

Russian suppliers that could meet the requirements of the city-state. Acronis, Kaspersky Labs, GroupIB and Sportmaster have developed here their innovative technologies and top-notch solutions in cybersecurity, cloud data management and new materials and are engaged in educational programmes with Singapore universities and polytechnics. Last year, a Russian company successfully installed aero-navigational equipment in Changi Airport as a result of a highly competitive tender by Singapore's Civil Aviation Authority. I am confident we will be seeing more of such interesting projects in future.

On the other hand, Singapore has also created very favourable ecosystem startups and scaleups which we are keen to explore. Sistema Asia Capital (venture capital) and Life.SREDA, (fin-tech) which operate from LaunchPad@OneNorth as accelerators and venture investors, are playing a role in bringing Russian innovators here. At the same

time, it is raising awareness of ACE (Action Community for Entrepreneurship) and Singapore entrepreneurs about doing business in Russia.

Secondly, we would like to see more food products originating from Russia in Singapore and vice-versa, in order to bring new flavours to our markets. As a result of active dialogue between the Singapore Food Agency and its Russian counterpart FSVPS (Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance) more Russian and Singapore companies have been accredited for the export of meats and seafood. We work closely with exhibition organizers to ensure high Russian representation at local F&B events. Unfortunately, this year's Food Hotel Asia Exhibition was postponed due to COVID-19. Right now, we are inviting Russian companies to bring canned vegetable, fish and poultry to Singapore as such interest was registered by the Russian Trade Commission here.

“Firstly, we are aware of Singapore’s demand for best-in-line technological solutions for smart cities, urban management, medical devices, energy-saving systems and keenness to bring Russian suppliers that could meet requirements of the city-state. Acronis, Kaspersky Labs, GroupIB and Sportmaster have developed here their innovative technologies and top-notch solutions in cybersecurity, cloud data management and new materials and are engaged in educational programmes with Singapore universities and polytechnics”

In the field of investment Singapore has been quite an active player in Russia. Food Empire and Amtel Properties were pioneers in this field; four regional airports in Krasnodarskiy Krai at the Black Sea and Vladivostok International airport on the Russian Pacific coast are managed and developed by Changi Airports Group. Olam International is the owner of a number of agricultural enterprises in Penzenskaya Oblast and Rostovskaya Oblast. Delta Wilmar, in turn, has been expanding its food processing portfolio all over Russia as well.

At this moment of time we are seeking new channels to encourage further investments between our countries.

Can you also comment about the EAEU-Singapore FTA potential?

The conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement between Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Singapore on 1 October 2019 was a historical achievement. We are aiming at much closer market connection between EAEU and Southeast Asian countries after the FTA's formal ratification. However, prior to that there is much work to be done, specifically in the finalization of Russia-Singapore Agreement on Trade in Services and Investments.

These two documents will bring new trade opportunities for Russian and Singaporean companies. We understand that today Singapore is already promoting trade liberalization which results in zero per cent duties for the majority of incoming goods. Therefore, we believe that the FTA will be a facilitator in such areas as technical regulation, address trade barriers, promote trade in services and streamline investment exchanges.

A major track of our cooperation under the FTA is the issue of standards. We are keen to explore and discover new opportunities in the field of standardization where Singapore has established itself as a regional leader. Given Russia's

intellectual and technological potential, we would like to join hands in designing new standards for Autonomous Vehicles, Artificial Intelligence, Industrial Internet of Things and Big Data. We have already made the first move towards this goal last year when authorities of Russia and Singapore, Enterprise Singapore (ESG) and GOST-R (Gosstandard i.e. National Standard, a document attesting that a product conforms to Russian national standard) signed an MoU in this field last June.

Is ESG/EDB-Russia cooperation set on a new course?

Our cooperation with ESG, Economic Development Board (EDB) and other Singapore agencies has been quite active over the last 15 years. The starting point was in 2005 when then Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and the then Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Herman Gref, decided to start Russia-Singapore Business Forum to rediscover each other's markets. This was followed by the establishment of an ESG (then IE Singapore) office in Moscow to promote Singapore business in Russia.

EDB, in turn, successfully attracted a group of Russian companies to Singapore. Both agencies (and not only them) have worked very close together with the Russian Embassy and Russian Trade Commission after renewal of its activities here in 2016.

Among the results of this solid business relationship worth mentioning is the successful development in Russia of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) when IE Singapore was a consultant from the very beginning in 2006.

Another one is a substantial Smart City Urban Transport Management System (UTMS) Project which is underway between the Government of Saint Petersburg and Singapore Cooperation Enterprise. Once completed, the project will introduce a brand-new transport system geared to address traffic jams by imple-



At the Moscow exhibition stand. Russia had a “real success” at ITB Asia 2019 and the country came with 84 participants. (Photo: Michael Ozaki)

menting traffic management and cost-cutting digital solutions.

Then, we are promoting Singapore exhibitions where companies from Russia can capitalize regional capacities of Singapore and introduce their solutions to the massive market of South East Asia. Last year Russia joined the relatively new but very promising Industrial Transformation Asia Pacific exhibition where 20 high-tech companies presented their solutions for Industry 4.0. Out of 8,000 visitors at our booth, among guests were Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Heng Swee Keat and other high ranking official and professionals from A*STAR, EDB, ESG and Singapore educational organizations. Another exhibition, ITB Asia, has been a real success for Russia in 2019 with 84 participants and five national stands where we brought senior management of Singapore Tourism Board for an excursion.

Finally, Ministries and Agencies of both countries closely interact on expert and high levels within the framework of the High-Level Russia-Singapore Inter-Governmental Commission to promote practical cooperation in various spheres of mutual interest.

How RDIF is Investing in the Fight Against COVID-19



President Putin was briefed by Mr Kirill Dmitriev, the CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) on the highlights of its recent success investing in antivirus projects

The RDIF is the country's sovereign wealth fund that was established in 2011. Over this time, it has invested 1.9 trillion roubles in the Russian economy, including 1.7 from banks and co-investors. President Putin said that was "a good ratio" and that the RDIF investments in various projects have created favourable and stable conditions for investment as well as a good return.

President Putin: You also use Russian National Wealth Fund money, the main reservoir of our financial "safety net," and our reserves, which are also managed very efficiently. I would like to discuss all these things. But of course, I would like to begin with the most important thing: the fight against the coronavirus. I know you are involved in this, too. If I remember correctly, you and your partners, including the Japanese, have created very effective rapid tests.

Mr Dmitriev: It is true that you instructed us to focus on combating the coronavirus and allocate funding to combat the virus. Our expert assessment along with that of our partners helped us to select the best Russian and global technologies to counter the coronavirus.

The RDIF – many now refer to us as the Russian antivirus investment fund – has focused on five key spheres of activity: testing, medicines, medical services, vaccines, and accompanying online services. We have focused on these areas because we believe that they help both maintain the health of Russians and restore economic activity as soon as possible.

As for testing, we see that many countries are focused on mass testing. We have invested in the Russian-Japanese testing system and have become the first Russian private system registered in Russia.

This system is unique because it can give the same test in 30 minutes that other systems need over two hours for. This is important because we have fast results and the equipment can perform three to four times more tests. This testing system has been used by leading Russian companies and at the beginning of the epidemic it gave us an opportunity to control outbreaks at Phosagro, Sibur and other companies and to provide industrial health safety. The mobility of it allowed the Ministry of Defence to use it both in Italy and Daghestan.

The international acceptance of this system is confirmed by the fact that we have sold over 10 million test kits to other countries after satisfying Russia's needs. These countries are buying the tests because they know them to be among the best in the world.

We have also invested in another system, which provides for lung X-ray analysis and detecting the coronavirus promptly and precisely using artificial intelligence.

As for medications, as you know, at first there were absolutely no medicines to fight the coronavirus, so we focused on searching for the most effective ones that would help our doctors protect people. Together with the company ChemRar, we created a new company on a parity basis and at a record pace. This new company started producing Avifavir, a drug that inhibits virus multiplication. The Ministry of Health registered this drug last week and now it is the first registered coronavirus medicine in Russia.

President Putin: One of two medicines registered in the world.

Mr Dmitriyev: That is right, one of two registered medications in the world. It was first developed in Japan to treat the flu. ChemRar modified it a little and changed the treatment guidelines. In fact, we were the first in the world to register a drug based on Favipiravir. As you said, it has become one of two in the world. We believe this to be a very important achievement because clinical tests indicate that this medication is one of the most promising in the world. It will be sent to Russian clinics as soon as June 11 and will be available to Russians at no cost under the Obligatory Medical Insurance programme.

We are also testing this medicine for outpatient treatment. First, we will have 700,000 dose packs per year. However, higher demand – we have requests from ten other countries – will prompt us to produce up to 2 million dose packs per year.

Mr President, all of this has been made possible thanks to your support of our activities in developing medicine and of other areas, as well. To date, only Russia, China, Japan and the US are producing medicines to treat the coronavirus.

We have also established a joint enterprise with Rostech's Nacimbio to produce virus antibodies based on blood plasma. Moreover, together with R-Pharm, we will produce a medicine to suppress the excessive response of the immune system to the virus.

President Putin: Which results in pneumonia.

Mr Dmitriyev: Yes. This means we have medicines to treat mild, medium and severe phases of the disease.

Regarding medical services, we have focused on preparing the bed inventory at private hospitals. The Mother and Child company has completely repurposed the Lapino Hospital, where Russians were treated under Compulsory Health Insurance at no cost.

Now to the vaccine, Mr President. You have said that Russia must develop and start producing a vaccine as soon as possible.



Today we announce for the first time that we, Alium, jointly with Sistema Holding, and R-Pharm will invest in the production of two vaccines, along with the Gamalei Institute. We believe this vaccine has shown very promising results. Moreover, after it covers Russia's demands, it could become a world leader among vaccines.

In terms of additional online services, we have focused on telemedicine and education. Thus, one of our companies, Doctis, showed that the number of requests for telemedicine has grown 20 times over, and the number of consulting doctors – tenfold. Today we will also announce a strategic partnership with Mail.ru to provide online medicine to 10 million Russian citizens.

We have also invested in Uchi.ru, an online education service that made it possible for 8 million school students to receive high-quality education in these difficult epidemiologic conditions.

In conclusion, Mr President, I would like simply to say that we will continue working with our leading international partners, as you suggested. We will continue investing in Russia's infrastructure, in part, with our leading partners.

Last year, we invested 365 billion roubles with our partners. In the first five months of this year, we have already invested 200 billion roubles, that is, more than last year. We will continue investing, also jointly with the infrastructure fund that is being created by the Ministry of Finance, with your approval. Along with other Russian funds (these are Elbrus Capital, RTP Ventures and Baring Vostok) we allocated 15 billion for investment in medium-sized companies that were hit by the crisis. We

will complete the first three deals this quarter.

President Putin: All right. But what is your general assessment of the situation in these, frankly speaking, difficult conditions of countering the infection. How are your partners responding to your proposals?

Mr Dmitriyev: You know, to begin with, they see that Russia has taken very powerful, tough measures. And, of course, we have managed to avoid what is happening in many other countries.

Secondly, they are really seeing that the Russian market is in good shape. They have looked at the economic recovery plan. They assess it very positively and are willing to continue investing in Russia.

They are seeing that Russia is motivated for partnership. We are discussing the joint production of medications and joint efforts to produce a vaccine. This makes Russia very different from many other countries that are trying to isolate themselves and avoid partnerships. Therefore, all of our partners have noted Russia's interest in partnerships.

President Putin: We are also succeeding in keeping macroeconomics in working order, in very good shape.

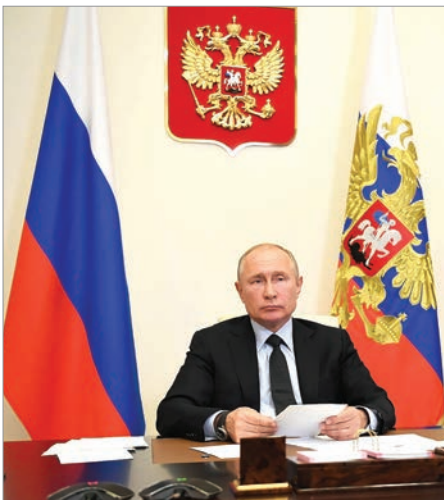
Mr Dmitriyev: Yes, certainly, because our debt is much smaller than that of other countries. This is a good foundation. Inflation has been kept in check as well.

President Putin: Our debt and inflation are within the parameters we announced before. Unemployment figures have grown but not as dramatically as in some other countries. Therefore, our partners have every reason to continue working with the RDIF.

Mr Dmitriyev: Undoubtedly, Mr President. We think we will be able to invest more funds than we did in the past. This is an indicator of the success of the Russian economic programme and shows what is happening in the Russian economy.

President Putin: Developing ICT as Russia Emerges from COVID-19

Excerpts from a speech by President Vladimir Putin (via video conference) on 10th June 2020 to key members of his cabinet and leaders of the country's Info Comm Technology (ICT) sector discussing how ICT can help prepare the country in light of the new reality that is evolving now that the world is emerging from the coronavirus pandemic



President Vladimir Putin

Participants in the video conference included

Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office Anton Vaino, First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov, First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office Sergei Kiriyenko, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko, Aide to the President Maxim Oreshkin, Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov, Minister of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media Maksut Shadayev, Moscow Region Governor and Head of the State Council Working Group on Communications, Telecommunications and the Digital Economy Andrei Vorobyov, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Oleg Bocharov, Chairman of the Management Board and CEO of Sberbank German Gref and heads of a number of ICT companies.

Today we are going to discuss the developments in the industry that largely define the speed, style and opportunities of people's life today as well as prospects of the labour market and the development of cities and territories: telecommunications and information technologies.

In Russia, this sphere has about 60,000 organisations, which achieve important and significant results. Russia is a confident world leader in an entire range of parameters such as the development of mobile and internet coverage. Russian companies are offering reliable software solutions, which can compete both on the domestic and global market.

The industry's role and importance were especially notable during the forced coronavirus-related restrictions, when many enterprises as well as educational and other organisations switched to online operations, when it was necessary to implement state decisions on support for Russian families and entire economic sectors as quickly as possible, to implement them using the available and user-friendly solutions we have developed jointly. Together, let me repeat this, together we have managed to do all of this, including using advanced information technologies and the infrastructure that has been built by the common effort of the state, businesses and innovative teams.

I would like to thank Russian telecommunications companies and specialists for ensuring the continuous operation and high level of popular services when the load has grown so much.

Let me note that for the communications and IT sector the situation we are currently facing was not only a challenging one. In fact, the companies that sought to satisfy

the growing demand offered free services and have ended up in a better position. I remember our meeting when we were only setting out on this journey, and at that time, a number of business leaders promised to offer some services free of charge. They really benefitted from these initiatives and expanded their client base.

Moreover, the restrictions we were compelled to impose motivated many enterprises and organisations to reconsider their usual business processes and become more proactive in introducing digital solutions to improve efficiency. Everyone learned first-hand the importance of being responsive and bold in making use of the far-reaching opportunities offered by digitalisation. This relates to the business world, as well as to government services, education, healthcare and even everyday life.

We need to pick up these digitalisation trends and follow the example of the companies at the forefront of this process. It goes without saying that we need to create conditions for accelerating and introducing Russian communications and IT technology that will lay the groundwork for creating high-quality sought-after goods and services.

Let me remind you that we have already taken a number of landmark decisions aimed at the development of the IT sector, including as part of the **Digital Economy National Project**. I highlighted a whole series of specific instructions in my Address to the Federal Assembly in January 2020. They have to be carried out, all of them. We need to be proactive and forward-looking and remove various barriers inherited from the distant past, while taking into consideration all possible aspects related to ensuring cyber security, and protecting personal rights and freedoms, of course.



During a meeting (via video conference) on the development of information and communications technologies

At the same time, we need to be aware of the challenges this sector and the economy in general are currently facing, primarily the fact that the real economy had to cut spending on innovation, software and related services. We can see, and the projections show us, that many companies will not have enough resources to shoulder these development programmes due to objective financial and economic constraints.

In this connection, I would like to ask our colleagues in the Government and the regions to give priority attention to supporting the demand for the products of our IT companies, both, and first of all, on the domestic market, and their export products. We should continue to develop and offer additional solutions to ensure the streamlined functioning and the further development of this industry. We are acting likewise in the other industries which we discussed at our meetings, including automobile and aircraft manufacturing, and so on. We must prop up people's incomes in these industries and create new jobs. I hope to be able to hear some practical recommendations regarding this today.

Training of Skilled Personnel Key Condition

Of course, the training of skilled personnel is a key condition for the development of the ICT industry. It is professionals and their knowledge and experience that determine the competitiveness of the Russian companies, as well as the market success of Russian products and designs.

All of us are aware that there is a high degree of mobility in the sphere of information technology around the world. However, this does not mean that we must "snatch and hold" professionals, as was

the case in the past. On the contrary, we must create transparent, attractive and competitive conditions for working and for implementing forward-looking ideas here in Russia. We must provide benefits to retain our software and communications professionals and help them to realise their potential, as well as attract mature professionals and promising young people from other countries too.

For example, the **Digital Breakthrough Contest** has been launched by the Russia – Land of Opportunities NGO to identify and promote the development of talented people. Last year it attracted 66,000 participants, who have offered over 1,000 digital solutions for healthcare, education, science, logistics, housing and utilities, and the urban environment.

I would like our businesses, as well as the federal and regional authorities to take note of this project, which is a truly large-scale event, and to make use of its participants' designs.

In general, I would also like to hear the opinions of our businesses about the additional solutions for the industry, if any are needed, in particular in the light of the new reality that is evolving now that the world is emerging from the coronavirus pandemic.

As I have mentioned already, the goal of these actions is to create globally competitive conditions for the work of our IT professionals in Russia, so that they can realise their creative and entrepreneurial potential here, in our country.

I would also like to sum up the results of this discussion and focus on the measures that require priority attention and particularly active implementation.

Legal Framework

First of all, we must work consistently to improve the legal framework, as our colleagues have already said today in different ways and for various reasons, to create conditions for the stable and long-term development of our high-tech companies and enterprises. I would like to ask the Government to prepare proposals on the creation of a highly convenient and, most importantly, competitive management system, including solutions for a comprehensive tax manoeuvre, which has been mentioned today, a manoeuvre that would stimulate the development of our IT industry.

Second, it is necessary to fully eliminate the barriers to launching and supporting promising ICT projects. In this context, I would like to ask the Government and the State Duma to speed up the development and adoption of the federal law on experimental legal modes: so-called regulatory sandboxes (I think someone has already mentioned them today), when prospective solutions such as (this has already been mentioned) self-driving transport or artificial intelligence in medicine are tested in practice in compliance with all the safety rules and requirements. Let me repeat that, of course, this should be under strict oversight, but still provide space for experiments. Of course, there should be control, but also the freedom of action for our colleagues. How else can we break new ground? It would be impossible.

Let me also remind you that last year we approved a long-term AI development strategy. We need a calculated step-by-step action plan to implement it. I know that the Government is developing a separate federal project on this, and I would like to ask them to step up this work to approve the project and launch it as soon as possible.

Third, today we have received specific proposals from industry representatives, as I have said. I have also said that all of them must be examined by the Government... This decision would allow businesses to save money, which means they would make their services more affordable for people.

Friends, let me once again thank you for the substantive conversation. I wish you success and hope that we will proceed in the required direction, at the required pace in order to achieve the success that interests us all: businesses, the state and, most importantly, our people.

ESG Sees Great Potential in Russia

ENTERPRISE SINGAPORE (ESG) explores how business interests, collaborations and opportunities between Singapore and Russia are expected to change in the light of COVID-19

**Enterprise
Singapore**



Interview with
Mr Yogeindran Thiagarajah,
Regional Group Director,
Middle East & Africa, C&E Europe
& Central Asia, Enterprise Singapore

What are the COVID-19 cooperation initiatives taken by your agency with Russia so far?

Singapore and Russia have maintained strong trade relations over the years and we endeavour to continue this through and beyond COVID-19. A key initiative that we are working on is the EAEU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EAEUSFTA) Framework Agreement and the Non-Services and Investment Agreement. The Non-Services and Investment Agreement of the EAEUSFTA covers market access for trade in goods via reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as other areas that facilitate trade such as competition, customs cooperation, e-commerce, environment, government procurement and intellectual property. As we strive to maintain connectivity and sustain global economic growth, this will be a big step towards deepening bilateral relations between Singapore and the EAEU bloc, of which Russia is the biggest market.

Which are the main Singaporean companies today with operations currently in Russia?

Singapore companies that have ventured into Russia have traditionally been in the natural resource sector. This includes companies such as Olam, which is active in the dairy and grains business and Delta Wilmar, which is in the seeds and edible oils business. Others have also ventured into the consumer sector, such as Food Empire, which is present in Russia through its MacCoffee brand.

Russia has proven credentials in science and technology; do you foresee any upcoming collaboration in this sector or any recent significant collaborations with Russia most recently?

We have seen an increasing number of Russian technology companies setting up businesses in Singapore. Many see Singapore as a gateway to Southeast Asia.

For example, Cybersecurity company, GroupIB, set up its headquarters in Singapore in 2018 as a significant portion of its revenue is generated from the Asia Pacific region and Singapore. In the area of research and development, Russian sports retailer, Sportmaster Group, has been collaborating with Singapore's Nanyang Technological University

(NTU) on material sciences for the development of their in-house brands. The company is also collaborating with the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Centre for Ageing to conduct preclinical studies to determine how specific clothing materials with chemical modifications could have effects on human metabolism and enhance healthy ageing and longevity.

Conversely, Singapore companies are also keen to partner Russian companies on tech and innovation across several sectors.

In 2018, Enterprise Singapore and Singapore's Action Community for Entrepreneurship signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Russian organisations Sistema Asia, Skolkovo Foundation and IIDF to explore collaboration in innovation and technology. Last year, Sistema Asia Capital set up an accelerator, Sales Jet Asia, which in collaboration with Mobile TeleSystems (MTS) and Skolkovo, provides assistance to Singapore-based startups interested in entering Russia. 10 Singapore startups have joined the first two runs of the programme and visited Moscow in November 2019 and March 2020.

Singapore companies providing digital solutions, such as AIQ and ViSenze (digital imaging), and Astech (Industry 4.0), have already found partnership opportunities in Russia. In intelligent transport, a consortium led by the Singapore Co-operation Enterprise (SCE) with companies ST Engineering Electronics and MSI Global, are working with the St Petersburg government to introduce a Unified Transport Management System based on intelligent transport systems.

How many companies of Russian origin are currently operating in Singapore and what were the growth trends of the main industry/business sectors Russia was engaged in with Singapore before COVID-19?

The Russian business community in Singapore is sizable. Notably, it has expanded from primarily the natural resource space, to technology, retail and fund management. More importantly, Russian companies are discovering other

“A key initiative that we are working on is the EAEU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EAEUSFTA) Framework Agreement and the Non-Services and Investment Agreement... As we strive to maintain connectivity and sustain global economic growth, this will be a big step towards deepening bilateral relations between Singapore and the EAEU bloc, of which Russia is the biggest market.”

ways in which Singapore's business and financial infrastructure can support their growth. For instance, in February 2020, agricommodity company Don Agro became the first Russian company to be listed on the Singapore Exchange.

With a current dip in investor sentiment, clubbed with travel restrictions, how is ESG preparing to keep the investor confidence up and have you planned any new programmes or initiatives?

Globally, many countries, including Singapore, have put in place travel restrictions in the fight against COVID-19. Businesses, especially those in the travel and lifestyle-related industries, have been more directly affected.

While challenging, we see companies pushing ahead with digitalisation and transformation efforts to ensure that their solutions and products remain relevant to market needs in the long term. Many MNCs also remain confident of Singapore's long-term prospects – for example, Hyundai announced in end-March that it was building an open innovation lab in Singapore to develop future mobility technologies for expansion into global markets.

Internationalisation remains on the radar of our companies. Businesses are turning to online means to stay connected, participating in virtual seminars and round tables. This enables us to stay engaged, cover as much ground as we can and prepare for future dealings when we meet in person.

Even as we manage the current COVID-19 situation, we see the long-term potential for Singapore companies



ESG led a Singapore group of startups on a visit to Russia (above) at the Singapore Embassy in Moscow

to collaborate with Russian businesses. First, in the tech and innovation areas as mentioned earlier. Second, collaboration in more traditional areas such as consumer products and services.

How can a small and medium enterprise keen on switching industries seek help in establishing itself in the Russian market and what sectors would you encourage them to consider?

As business models and models change in the post COVID-19 era, some of the tech solutions that have been designed for a particular sector can be channeled for new needs. For instance, we are seeing interest in how technology can facilitate safe distancing or contactless transactions in retail. Some of our SMEs are looking at how their Bluetooth or Artificial Intelligence solution can achieve these goals.

What incentives does Singapore provide for companies that make it as a regional hub to enter the ASEAN market?

We welcome Russian companies to use Singapore as a gateway to enter the region, and partner our Singapore companies to do so. Singapore enjoys strong economic ties with ASEAN, and many Singapore companies have investments and projects in the region. Singapore has strong transport and trading links with other markets in the

region, as well as the presence of global financial and professional firms familiar with these markets. Russian companies can take advantage of them to set up base in Singapore from which to expand and manage their businesses in the ASEAN markets. Singapore companies that have experience in the region are also familiar with the diverse culture and

business landscape, and can be valuable partners for Russian companies. For tech startups, we have a strong ecosystem of community partners who can provide the right connections, mentorship and support for them to kickstart their businesses not only in Singapore but also the ASEAN region.

We understand that this is a very difficult time for SMEs. There is pressure to maintain and keep your businesses afloat, while planning for an uncertain economic future. However, it is important that SMEs continue to quickly adapt and adjust to the new operating environment as the way businesses operate has changed significantly.

Digitalisation will no doubt play an even more important role now. In fact, the COVID-19 situation has pushed some SMEs to accelerate the adoption of digital solutions, be it to streamline their backend processes or make it more efficient to work from home. They have to start thinking about how to integrate their daily activities through digital solutions, or carry out business transactions online to diversify their revenue streams and customer groups.

Enterprise Singapore is committed to support businesses to digitalise, strengthen and build their current capabilities to deal with more immediate challenges.

Nizhny Novgorod Region Reaches Out for Partners

Governor Gleb Nikitin heads a business mission with “the most challenging and unique projects” for Russia. Ambitious scale and opportunities await participation in this region



Interview with
Governor Gleb Nikitin
of the Nizhny Novgorod Region

Last November a business delegation from Russia's Nizhny Novgorod (NN) Region visited Singapore led by its Governor Gleb Nikitin. He held a number of meetings with Singaporean companies including Surbana Jurong, Resort World Sentosa which is the world's largest marine park; he also had a meeting with the Keppel Corporation, which produces offshore drilling structures for deep sea oil and gas recovery.

A media release issued on the visit said the delegates will discuss prospects for further development of inter-regional relations and cooperation as they present “the most challenging and unique projects for Russia” which could be implemented together with Singaporean companies.

These include territory development projects such as the creation of a IT cluster in the historical part of the Nizhny Novgorod City; a multifunctional cultural and education center; the construction of one of the largest freshwater aquariums in Europe and the “Volganarium” as well as the Industrial Production Special Economic Zone “Kulibin”, the industrial park in Dzerzhinsk, and the unique Digital Field technology, which can take resource extraction in the Oil & Gas industry to new high quality levels (see accompanying box story next page).

Opportunity Russia was able to talk to Governor Nikitin on the objectives of the visit and share more information about the Nizhny Novgorod. This is Governor Nikitin's first trip to Singapore in his current capacity but he has been to the city-state before as the Russian Federation's Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade.

How does Nizhny Novgorod City stand apart from other places in Russia?

The city will celebrate its 800th anniversary in 2021 and the region's size in terms of population is 3.2 million and it is very economically developed.

In the late 19th to early 20th Century the region was considered to be the financial centre of Russia, maybe even Europe and, to a certain extent, of the world. The prices of some products traded in the world then was decided during the Nizhny Novgorod Fair. In the 20th Century during the Soviet era, it was considered the third most significant capital after Moscow and St Petersburg. Today Nizhny is also considered to be the Nuclear Capital of the world! It is one of the few places which has the high level of expertise in nuclear energy technology and science. Within the city itself there are about 60 R&D centres and 11 universities. The famous and highly respected Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Applied Physics is also sited in Nizhny.

So we have great potential in all these spheres and we have to now develop this potential by increasing the status of the capital of this region with several iconic landmark projects that will raise its profile in areas such as the city's cultural life by creating new spaces and zones such as a new philharmonic hall, museums etc.

We are not only looking at projects that will uplift our cultural and social life, but also those that will develop our scientific, education, our industries and Small to Medium businesses.

Were you inspired by any country or city to model the development of the Nizhny Novgorod region?

I was very impressed by Singapore's rate of development and I was also truly impressed as well as by what I saw at places such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi and I believe Nizhny Novgorod has the same potential to develop in a similar way.

What is the scale and estimated costs that you envisage to make your development plans a reality?

It is approximately US\$1.5 billion.

“Nizhny Novgorod is one of the few places which has the high level of expertise in nuclear energy technology and science. Within the city itself there are about 60 R&D centres and 11 universities. The famous and highly respected Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Applied Physics is also sited in Nizhny”

What is the timeframe of the projects proposed and how quickly can a business be established there?

I would like to highlight one of our projects that’s akin to creating what we call a big industrial “supermarket.” There are different instruments for industrial projects in terms of special taxation regulations, financial measures to cut investment expenses depending on where you are going e.g. to the Special Economic Zone, or the Innovation Technological Centre or to the territory for social and economic development. There are different regulations for different destinations.

We have already established several industrial parks and a territory for economic development for an IT cluster in the city; these projects can be developed with Singaporean partners very quickly.

Can you give greater details on what are the incentives or factors potential investors should consider in deciding to invest in Nizhny Novgorod?

Recently there has been an event that has taken place that has been underestimated here - the Free Trade Agreement between Singapore and the Eurasian Economic Union that was signed (on 1st Oct 2019). Many here consider this just one of the many that have been signed between Singapore and other countries. It becomes part of a great global landscape and many might feel it does not make a great difference.

Actually before this the EAEU had only one FTA and that was with Vietnam and the second one was with Singapore. So it is rare and Singapore has always been considered as a gateway and is in a strong position to be the meeting point for all the countries in the world to be the gateway to EAEU.

You asked about special incentives. I suggest one can create a special Singapore Industrial Zone as an integrator for all companies interested in accessing all the other markets in the EAEU.

ABOUT NIZHNY NOVGOROD REGION

Located almost in the heart of Russia, the region is considered as one of the most economically developed in the country, contributing 1.7% of the Gross Regional Product of the Russian regions. Its population is 3.2 million. The region’s basic industrial branches are automotive industry, metallurgy, chemical industry, oil production and other processing industries. The region is a leader in bus production (about 80% of total Russian production), 40% of Russian trucks, more than 33% of PVC, 43% of steel pipes, more than 15% of newsprint and 13% of ethylene are produced here.



Source: Yuri Lebedev / Wikimedia Commons

PROJECTS

KULIBIN-SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE (SEZ)

This Industrial Production SEZ is near the large city of Dzerzhinsk and is slated to open in 2020. It covers 72.3 hectares and already possesses the necessary engineering infrastructure so residents can start project implementation immediately. Main activities: Production of chemical substances and products, pharmaceuticals, rubber and plastic products, products made of composite materials, automotive components and logistics.

DZERZHINSK INDUSTRIAL PARK

Situated next to Kulibin (see above) the park covers 100 hectares and the project is to form a network of engineering and transport infrastructure.

NN TERRITORY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Development of digital hubs within the centre of this historical city as well as an IT cluster in the city’s

Pochain ravine with a total area of eight hectares.

CULTURAL AND EDUCATION CENTER

Located in one of the most picturesque and promising areas - Strelka. The center’s total area is 121,276 sq m and will include the Expocentre, Exhibition Pavilions, philharmonic hall, an education centre, hostel, four museums, a theatre and concert complex.

VOLGANARIUM

This is going to be a large scientific, educational and cultural centre on a 13 hectares plot in Bor city on the banks of the Volga River. The complex will also include one of the largest freshwater aquariums as well as an Ecology Museum.

DIGITAL FIELD

Development of a technology of digital modeling of the oil and gas field at the stage of exploration and output.

Op-Ed: EAEU-Singapore FTA Opens Asia for Russian Businesses

by Chris Devonshire-Ellis

Singapore's recent signing up of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is poised to provide a new, significant outlet for Russian outbound investment into Asia



Chris Devonshire-Ellis
Chairman and Founding Partner
Dezan Shira & Associates

“With Russian exports to Singapore already in the US\$3.5 billion bracket, the new Singapore-EAEU FTA can be expected to have a major and positive impact. Russian businesses not already in the market should be seriously thinking about claiming their space in this expanding trade corridor.”

Singapore has one of the most liberal tax and administrative regimes in the world and is technically advanced and efficient. It is easier for Russian businesses to establish bank accounts in Singapore than in Hong Kong, for example, although the banks will conduct the usual ‘Know Your Client’ protocols. Corporate establishment in Singapore is also relatively quick and easy, while dealing with regulatory authorities is precise and efficient.

Russia also has a double tax treaty (DTA) with Singapore, which allows tax relief in certain trade and service areas and mitigates against the prospects of being taxed in both countries.

It also permits, through the use of substituting profits tax for withholding tax mechanism, the ability to discount profits taxes by 5 to 10 percent through the charging of IP fees and so on (professional advice needs to be taken to arrange this with the Singaporean authorities).

The Singapore FTA with the EAEU will significantly reduce tariffs on products traded between Russia and Singapore, in addition to the other members of the EAEU – Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

With Russian exports to Singapore already in the US\$3.5 billion bracket, the new Singapore-EAEU FTA can be expected to have a major and positive impact. Russian businesses not already in the market should be seriously thinking about claiming their space in this expanding trade corridor.

Singapore Plus Three: FTAs with ASEAN, China, and India

Singapore has other major advantages too. It is a member of the ASEAN regional free trade bloc, and as such enjoys free trade on most goods and services between it and Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Russian businesses already exporting to these markets might find it makes profitable sense to do so via a Singaporean subsidiary. It makes no difference if the shareholders are Russian – as long as the incorporation is based in Singapore it is eligible for free trade in ASEAN.

Singapore also has FTAs with China and India: the Singapore-China FTA and the Singapore-India FTA. Russian nationals can also incorporate a company in Singapore to take advantage of these agreements. They provide significant tariff reductions on Singapore-China and Singapore-India trade.

It's an especially wise tax-reducing structure when one considers that Russia itself has DTAs with many countries in Asia. Often these overlap with the DTAs that Singapore has, meaning Russia-Singapore-Asia tax efficiency mechanisms are relatively straightforward to use.

Singapore can also be used as a base to reach out to other markets. These include Australia, which is less than a 5-hour flight from Singapore and has a DTA with the country. Australia runs as a complementary partner to the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), which in turn brings New Zealand into Singapore's free trade tax sphere of influence. Sri Lanka, already a popular winter home for many Russians, also has a DTA with Singapore.

The well established Russian export markets of Japan, South Korea, and Turkey have DTAs with Singapore, while the Singapore-European Union Free Trade Agreement was signed up just a few months ago and is also shortly to come into force.

Singapore also provides incentives for foreign-owned start-ups. These include tax breaks, lower profits tax rates and other benefits.

Continued on page 23...



More than a Decade of Progress

Russia-Singapore Business Council (RSBC) remains busy and successful. The Council's executives established a company RSTRADE in 2016 to implement the wide range of tasks that are needed for promoting business between both countries

The RSBC was an initiative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation with its first meeting held on 6th October 2009. Deputy CEO of the State Corporation Rostec, Mr Nikolay Volobuev was elected Chairman with the support of representatives from the business community, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation.

The seeds for that inaugural meeting were sown earlier in September following talks between the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev and the then Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and Minister Mentor of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew took place.

The vision of the leaders was expressed in the mission of the Council which was, among other objectives, the development of business contacts and mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and Singapore entrepreneurs.

The RSBC also sought the enhancement of the role of interested members of the Russian business community in formation and implementation of the state policy in the sphere of Russia-Singapore economic relations.

It is hoped that the Council can unite efforts and the organization of constructive dialogue between Russia and Singapore business circles, interested in sustainable development and improving the efficiency.

To implement this wide range of tasks in the field of foreign promotion, in 2016 the executive structure of the

Council established RSTradehouse LLC in Russia, and in 2017 – the Centre for Overseas Promotion of Russian High-Tech Companies and Presentation of Investment Projects in Singapore.

This was considered an important tool to expand the interaction of Russian companies with partners from ASEAN countries in the export-import international B2B Platform with RSTrade.

Again, these initiatives were supported by the Russian leadership and the decision of the Russia-Singapore High-Level Intergovernmental Commission.

RSTrade Platform - A Key Tool

RSTrade Platform is one of the key tools and stepping stones to help facilitate Russian companies who have an interest in ASEAN markets. Today, there are more than 83,000 companies from 26 countries and 400 services represented on the RSTrade Platform.

Fully developed in Russia and operated by RSTradehouse LLC, the Platform is integrated with the State Industry Information System and with the CamelONE international electronic platform (operated by vCargo Cloud, Singapore).

According to estimates by Bloomberg, the RSTrade and CamelONE integrated solution for the automation of international trade and multimodal transport will grow to have global importance in the near future.

The activities of the Business Council provide the basis for the acceleration of the Russian presence in the region and significantly expand the opportunity for Russian companies to use the business support infrastructure and development institutions that are operating in Singapore.



Chairman Mr Nikolay Volobuev
The Council's main office is in Moscow with branch offices in Singapore, Samara, Novosibirsk and representatives in Saint Petersburg, Barnaul and Yekaterinburg

Since 2016 the RSBC have organised and achieved many milestones including:

- 11 business forums held in conjunction with the meetings of the High-Level Russia-Singapore Inter-Governmental Commission
- 20 conferences and Business Dialogues
- 22 business missions
- 14 educational programmes
- More than 1,000 business contacts established
- 40 agreements and 15 export and import contracts with a total value of more than 17.5 Bln roubles signed
- More than 300 Russian and international mass media covering the events

With the assistance of the Council and the direct participation of its executive structure, the first agreement and contracts on high-tech civilian products in the SEA countries were concluded and are now being implemented.

Currently, joint engineering projects are being implemented at the Centre for Overseas Promotion in Singapore in the interests of key Russian industrial companies, and infrastructure for the sale of high-tech civilian products has already been created. The Centre consists of a permanent Showroom to present Russian High-Tech Enterprises products in physical as well as in digital form. Till date, 25 Russian companies are being exhibited and over 160 projects are presented at the Overseas Promotion Centre in Singapore.

MacCoffee Going Far and Beyond in Russia

MacCoffee might have been born in Singapore but it grew so tall it became a household name for instant coffee in Russia. Here is a glimpse of how **Food Empire** stays on top and visible to become an everyday part of many Russians' lives

Since Food Empire launched its now ubiquitous 3-in-1 instant MacCoffee into the Russian consumer market in 2018, its success was followed by its new cappuccino flavor, the MacCoffee Cappuccino Di Torino Cinnamon in 2019. Cappuccino Di Torino has expanded globally and is currently selling in Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The SGX Mainboard-listed company has now become a global branding and manufacturing food and beverage company that specialises in instant beverages, snack food and frozen convenience food.

Today Food Empire Holdings' products are exported to more than 50 countries in markets such as Russia, Vietnam, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, China, the Middle East, Mongolia and North America. The Group has 23 offices (representative and liaison) worldwide and operates seven manufacturing facilities in Malaysia, India, Vietnam, Russia and Ukraine.

In Russia, the company has not rested on its laurels and continues to grow and consolidate its dominance in the coffee beverage sector of the market by taking part in many exciting and unique projects and appearances. Most recently, it has scored several marketing collaborations and prominent promotional activities. For the first time in history, the brand has been featured in several music videos of popular singers and bands. MacCoffee also participated in the hugely popular Boogel Woogel Festival and Grelkafest, which are famous for skiers and snowboarders.



"Apart from the company's marketing activities, Food Empire is also committed to give back to the community. With the recent pandemic outbreak, it is indeed a difficult time for the world. As a way of saying a huge "thank you" to all frontliners for keeping everyone else safe in the fight against COVID-19, Food Empire's Russia team has distributed MacCoffee to seven different cities and several hospitals in Russia to provide all staff one of the simple pleasures in life amidst their busy work schedule - having a cup of coffee during their breaktime"

Last year MacCoffee was also part of Alfa Future People (AFP) 2019, an epic EDM and dance music festival held in Nizhny Novgorod region.

MacCoffee has also always been supportive of sporting events and the company is honoured to be one of the main sponsors of the annual European Figure Skating Championships and the Gangarín Cup for ice hockey.

To round off the year the brand was honoured with two prestigious awards that reflected the support and trust its customers have in its products over the years - such as the highly-acclaimed Narodnaya Marka and the Product of the Year Award 2019.

Apart from the company's marketing activities, Food Empire is also committed to give back to the community. With the recent pandemic outbreak, it is indeed a difficult time for the world. As a way of saying a huge "thank you" to all frontliners for keeping everyone else safe in the fight against COVID-19, Food Empire's Russia team has distributed MacCoffee to seven different cities and several hospitals in Russia to provide all staff one of the simple pleasures in life amidst their busy work schedule - having a cup of coffee during their breaktime. Food Empire believes that "As long as we stay united and strong, we can beat all odds." Following are more details on the highlights of the above events and awards.

Boogel Woogel Festival and Grelkafest

The highly-anticipated and high-altitude Boogel Woogel festival was held at the legendary ski resort, Rosa Khutor, while GrelkaFest was held at the famous Siberian Ski Resort Sheregesh, with MacCoffee as an avid supporter of both festivals once again! Despite the weather conditions, more than a thousand skiers and snowboarders were present and participated in the various activities, including the beauty pageants! MacCoffee had its own pavilion that provided red puffs, VR glasses, wonderful music, cool prizes, grilled marshmallows, and lots of delicious MacCoffee Cappuccino di Torino to keep skiers and snowboarders warm on the snowy slopes.



(Top & second rows): Promotional activities: Appeal of winter sports and a fun active lifestyle; good times from a cup of MacCoffee at events such as the Boogel Woogel Festival and Grelkfest

(Third row, from left): Sweet Recognition: Product of the Year 2019 National Award; It also clinched the highly-coveted No. 1 Brand in Russia for coffee drinks; Good coffee goes with good music: music video Vozmi moe serdce by world-famous DJs Filatov & Karas and Russian artist Burito

MacCoffee in Music Videos

For the first time in history, MacCoffee is featured in several music videos. The first music video titled *Vozmi moe serdce* (Take My Heart) is by world-famous DJs Filatov & Karas and Russian artist Burito, and is produced by Warner Music Russia music label. The second music video featuring MacCoffee was released shortly after and was performed by famous Russian band Gayazovs Brothers. Just recently in March 2020, MacCoffee is also featured in the trendy music video by the young Russian pop artist Fogel.

Cappuccino Di Torino Cinnamon

This instant cappuccino drink, which includes aromatic cinnamon flakes, is prepared on the basis of the famous recipe from the Italian city of Turin. Now a good cup of cappuccino can be enjoyed anytime and in the comfort of our homes by simply emptying the sachet in a cup, adding hot water and stirring.

Product of the Year 2019 National Award

MacCoffee triumphs once again at the Product of the Year 2019 National Award ceremony in Moscow. Every year, the Award Ceremony recognises the most popular FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) products. MacCoffee has won the "Product of the Year 2019" award in the category of "Coffee with milk / sugar / cream additives".

Narodnaya Marka

This year, MacCoffee has once again clinched the highly-coveted "No. 1 Brand in Russia" award title in the category of coffee drinks.

The "Narodnaya Marka" competition is a ranking of leading FMCG brands in the Russian market based on nominations gathered from consumers and the first brand that comes to the minds of consumers. We are pleased to know that MacCoffee is the top choice and a trusted brand among consumers and we thank everyone for their strong support.

Tatiana Sheremetieva: Exceptional Russian Style & Business

Why the CEO of the Russian Asian Business Union is positive and confident about the prospects for business in the immediate post-pandemic period



Tatiana Sheremetieva
CEO of Russian Asian Business
Union and Russian Singapore
Business Union

“What’s important is the proper introduction to the right people as it may open up for you many doors - and in the long run save you time and money. That’s what we are here for - working as a trustworthy agent, or bridge, between both sides”

Starting her working career from the tender age of 17 in Russia and having relocated her own business to Singapore eight years ago, entrepreneur Tatiana Sheremetieva-CEO:Russian Asian Business Union Pte Ltd, shares her outlook on business opportunities post-pandemic, life in Singapore and Russia and the growing presence of women leaders in the arena of business and politics - Your reading of how business interest will shape up post-COVID-19 between Russia and ASEAN.

What is your reading of how business interest will shape up post- Covid-19 between Russia and ASEAN?

As history teaches us, all crises are temporary. My forecast, about the shaping of interest between Russia and ASEAN in post-Covid times, is quite positive. However, the intensity of this development of positivity may, in the short term, be slowed down because of travel and border restrictions. Speaking about a mid and long-term overview, it would be pertinent to keep in mind that Russia remains the biggest country in the world, and that it is rich in natural and human resources. The current pandemic crisis and falling oil prices had slowed down Russian economy and devalued the ruble, which is an advantage for international trade of commodities. Russia, on the other hand, one must remember is also a large consumer and e-commerce market and also, because of its strategic position, it is a window to European markets.

ASEAN countries are rapidly growing markets, which makes it a situation of great interest for Russian companies looking for new opportunities to capitalize on. When it comes to Singapore, not only is it a popular financial and trade hub, it is also a perfect window to the ASEAN and Asia Pacific regions. During the last 10 years I have studied the slow, but growing increase in interest in ASEAN countries among Russian businesses

and vice versa. There is also great room for development of travel activities between both regions in post-Coronavirus times.

What has been your personal experience in working and living in Singapore?

I have been living and working in Singapore for over eight years now and frankly speaking I love it! With the climate in Russia being pretty tough because it's cold most months of the year, it can be very trying. After living in Moscow in these conditions all year round, ever since my birth over 26 years ago, Singapore seems like a paradise to me! I consider Singapore a great place to live in, especially if you have a family. Singapore is making huge efforts to keep the country safe and comfortable for living. The downside here, however, is the high price of living when it comes to apartments, medical or buying a car. That said, I believe Singapore is also a great place for doing business — it's secure, safe, quite straight forward in terms of rules and regulations and has moderate taxes. Even if the local market is small, it's a good place for setting up a holding company, test bed ideas and expand to other SEA and Asian countries.

Please share how you have been able to build linkages between businesses and how you can help companies post-pandemic crisis.

There are many components for a successful international business: a good product or service, competitive prices, understanding of local culture, languages, mentality and necessities. It's also extremely important to find a reliable and trustworthy partner, provider or client, as there are still many cases of fraud activities. Nevertheless, what's important is, the proper introduction to the right people, as it may open up for you many doors — and in the long run also save you time

and money. That's what we are here for — working as a trustworthy agent, or bridge, between both sides.

We have a group of companies that are dedicated to a variety of business needs, such as legal support, accounting, consulting, trade, IT, business events and business travel.

Basically, we take care of the core infrastructure — from conducting market research and setting up a business to finding the right partner and supporting your business development. Because of our range of activities, we have a big database of clients and companies, which greatly helps in building linkages between businesses. In the pre-pandemic scenario we used to organize conferences, road shows, seminars and also took active part in business forums — all of which also help in developing a trustworthy business community.

Please share, in brief, your own history as a woman entrepreneur and trends you see for Russian women in enterprise.

I was 17 years old when I started

working. At 18 years of age I became a brand manager of the Russian State insurance company. When I was 23 years old I became Deputy General Director of a Russian railways subsidiary. But when I turned 25 I decided to run my own business. Eight years ago I relocated to Singapore, where I founded my group of companies in legal services, travel, business events, IT and trade and investment. More recently, I launched a sports academy for adults and children. My companies today work in over 15 countries, serving clients from around the globe. At the same time I'm a happy wife and mother.

What I see happening globally is that more and more women tend to go into business. There are plenty of examples of women leading companies or even countries, while simultaneously juggling their roles as wives and mothers. In Russia too I see a similar trend. However, I would mention that society is still more traditionally oriented toward men as breadwinners.

“I believe Singapore is also a great place for doing business — it's secure, safe, quite straight forward in terms of rules and regulations and has moderate taxes. Even if the local market is small, it's a good place for setting up a holding company, test bed ideas and expand to other SEA and Asian countries”

...continued from page 18

Singapore is a primary investment destination for Russian businesses and investors looking at Asia, as it possesses a reputation for excellent regulatory and financial services, together with superb infrastructure and ease of doing business rankings. It is currently ranked second globally according to World Bank data.

Singapore's plethora of DTAs and FTAs are complementary to those that Russia also has throughout the region, and this means it is also an excellent Asian headquarters for Russian businesses that are looking at investing in the manufacturing or services industries, or taking part in other investment opportunities elsewhere in Asia.

This will only increase and expand the total trade volume in the Russia-Singapore trade corridor, as pending deals such as the Singapore-EAEU FTA and the Singapore-EU FTA come into effect.

However, Russian investors must appreciate that the timescale to get

involved in this will be limited – many other Russian businesses are already in the market and competition will only increase.

Like all capital markets, it is the best-established and entrenched that will prosper the most – meaning now is the time for Russian businesses to start looking at Asia, giving serious consideration to Singapore as the primary destination.



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ЗАКЛАДКИ ПЕРВОГО КАМНЯ РОССИЙСКОГО КУЛЬТУРНОГО ЦЕНТРА
 GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY FOR THE RUSSIAN CULTURAL CENTRE

Russia- Singapore Vibrant Cultural Kaleidoscope

by Solovev Aleksandr



Сингапур
Ноябрь 2018



(Above): President Vladimir Putin and President Halimah Yacob at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Russian Cultural Centre. (Right): Before the groundbreaking ceremony President Putin reviewing artist impressions of the completed centre which will also house the Russian Orthodox Church



Solovev Aleksandr
First Secretary of the Embassy of
the Russian Federation
in Singapore
Representative of
Rossotrudnichestvo



(Above): Singapore VVIPs including Education Minister Ong Ye Kung and former Foreign Minister George Yeo with Russians in Singapore who were also present at the laying of the foundation stone of the upcoming Russian Cultural Centre at Rangoon Road

Down the decades, ever since Singapore and Russia entered into a diplomatic arrangement, both countries have worked hard on many levels to strengthen this mutually-beneficial and productive alliance — and intrinsic to this agenda has been the close-knit people-to-people connectivity through a vibrant spectrum of cultural interfaces.

Historically speaking, Russia and Singapore have been actively nourishing the relations between them since the volatile times of the 19th century. In fact, the year 2020 officially marks a watershed year in this close alliance, being the 52th Anniversary of the formal diplomatic relations between both nations.

“The completion of the Russian Cultural Center with the Orthodox Church in Singapore is expected to vigorously facilitate cooperation in the areas of art, culture and education”

The key features, of this engagement between the two countries, cover the entire gamut of economic, scientific, technical and cultural activities. What's interesting is that in recent years one has witnessed a definitive shift in the area of cultural collaboration between Russia and Singapore. There has been a concerted effort to expand and enhance communication between scientists, artists and sportsmen; also a more robust two-way movement in the field of tourism has begun to develop.

On the cultural front both Russia and Singapore have their very own treasure-trove of history, heritage and traditions, which they can share in order to enrich the development of their relations in this area—as also to underpin their mutual interest in strengthening their cooperation and collaborations in the years to come

In the light of this, already several teams have arrived from Russia to participate in international festivals being held in Singapore. In addition to this Singaporean audiences have enjoyed the fruits of Russian film week and the number of music concerts organized by the Russian embassy here. The most famous conductors based in Singapore, Darrell Ang and Amos Chia, for example, had their training at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 2018 Singaporeans were treated to a wonderful performance by world renowned Russian violist Yuri Bashmet.

Each year the Russian embassy has also organized concerts of classical music in Singapore. It is hoped that with the opening of the Russian Cultural Center in Singapore, the embassy will be able to increase the number of concert tours. The

the between the two countries. The Russian embassy in Singapore plans to offer schools in the city-state the opportunity to participate in international contests and festivals that are organized with the support of Russia. Additionally, Russia hosts a unique campaign to provide citizens of Singapore with the opportunity to get higher education at any university in Russia and in any specialty on a free-of-charge basis.

In 2017, Nanyang Technological University decided to include courses in the Russian language in its curriculum. Founded by two Russian teachers and educational enthusiasts a school for children – KIT (Knowledge Intellect Talent), is also being actively developed in Singapore. The Russian Language center is thriving. Russian language courses for both kids and



In the process of nourishing this motivational agenda, in September 2019, a Singapore-based representative of Rosotrudnichestvo started working as a member of the Russian Embassy in city-state. His main goals were to develop these cultural ties, even as he was tasked to supervise the design and construction of the Russian Cultural Centre and the Orthodox Church. The completion of the Russian Cultural Center in Singapore is expected to vigorously facilitate cooperation in the areas of art, culture and education.

Currently, cooperation in the cultural sphere between Russian artists and Singaporeans is in a state of hectic activity in order to set things in place for future developments in the city-state, given the huge growth potential there is for this kind of interface. This is particularly encouraging as there is considerable interest amongst both nations that work on this platform of engagement moves forward quickly.



(Top row and above): A very prominent area of cooperation between Russia and Singapore has been the educational sphere, which has witnessed a number of activities to engage school students in this cultural interface the between the two countries

embassy also fields a number of offers to hold exhibitions of Singaporean artists who have studied in Russia.

A very prominent area of cooperation between Russia and Singapore has been the educational sphere, which has witnessed a number of activities to engage school students in this cultural interface

adults are underway and receiving an enthusiastic response. Russian Language for kids and cooperation in education and professional training may prove to be a very promising area in the years to come.

Of note is Singapore's interest in Russian methodology for training and evaluating the knowledge of students in mathematics and natural science. For example, a group of Singaporean high school students took part in the Yakutia International Science Games 2018, which included the “Tuymaada” Olympiad in mathematics, physics, chemistry and computer science, as well as other segments such as 3D modeling and robotics. Moreover, the National Research Foundation of Singapore holds the annual Global Young Scientists Summit to which young Russian scientists are also invited.

Continued on page 27...



Sergey Lukianenko
Arguably Russia's most
popular sci-fi and fantasy
author

Builder of Worlds: Sergey Lukianenko Russia's EPIC Fantasy Sci-Fi Writer

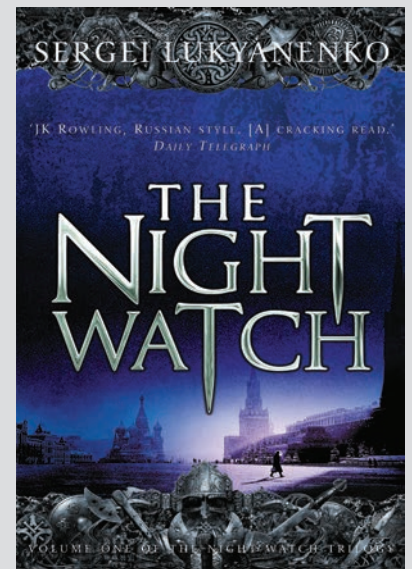
His literary achievements and success with his *Night Watch* books and movies have been described as transforming him from a 'just famous' Russian author to now a national 'landmark'. The latest of his books 'A Rough Draft' has been made into a major movie. *Opportunity Russia* had the chance to talk to the author who was in Singapore for the film's premier last December



The famous fantasy writer met fans and had a lively discussion at a special screening of 'A Rough Draft' at the cinema in Suntec City on 5th December 2019

Sergey's trip to Singapore was an initiative by the Moscow government and supported by the Russian Embassy in Singapore to promote cultural programmes for fellow compatriots and Singaporeans. The 52-year old author also had the chance to meet and talk to the audiences who attended the two full-capacity shows as well as sign autographs for fans.

Sergey told *Opportunity Russia* that he was very happy with the reception of the audience to the new film which is the third major title to follow in the footsteps of the phenomenal success of the movies based on his first two books of the *Night Watch* series (see *accompanying box story*).



ABOUT 'NIGHT WATCH' SEXTOLOGY

The *Night Watch* fantasy genre novels are about the war between two supernatural groups - the *Night Watch*, which is dedicated to policing the actions of the *Dark Others*, and the *Day Watch*, which polices the actions of the *Light Others*.

It is set in contemporary Moscow and is an epic saga spread over six books that chronicles the conflict between mages, vampires and werewolves: *The Night Watch* (2006), *The Day Watch* (2006), *The Twilight Watch* aka *Dusk Watch* (2007), *The Last Watch* (2008), the *New Watch* (2013) and *Sixth Watch* (2016).

The first two books were made into very successful movies that made Sergey not only a well-known sci-fi writer in Russia but a world famous celebrity with millions of fans.

The first two *Night Watch* books enjoyed massive success after being transformed into movies, and Sergey was frank in answering how their success placed some pressure on him and influenced the writing of successive books. He said, "I definitely felt pressure. There were people who challenge you asking whether those

“A reader new to Sergey’s works can find both wonder and variety. The Night Watch series though is still the best introduction for new readers to the author. This book provides the best example of Sergey’s creative process and is the most accessible...”



ABOUT 'A ROUGH DRAFT'

Rough Draft tells of a Russian living in Moscow who discovers he has the ability to travel to “parallel worlds”. This tale of a seeming multiverse of alternate realities finds the hero visiting many different versions of Moscow. He eventually discovers the reason why and who is behind the creation of all the worlds which have similar environments and seem to be on planet Earth but the societies and people are different.

successes represented the peak of your career? Or can you come up with something more or better? So certainly I felt there were more biases against my next book or movies.”

Sergey, having shared his opinion on his success and its accompanying pressures, also smiles at the end, indicating that he has reconciled with these pressures. “Just as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle might have said “I hate Sherlock Holmes’, because it was so successful, or though JK Rowling is always associated with the Harry Potter series she would like to write different genres - I myself try to stand apart from all that, as you don’t need that kind of pressure in your creative process,” said Sergey.

That approach has certainly paid off as Sergey is recognised as an established

writer with a prolific output with almost 50 books to date. The success of Night Watch showed the potential of his works to catapult to stratospheric heights – the latest is ‘A Rough Draft’ (see accompanying box story left).

Are there any other of his titles that have the potential to reach a wider audience through cinema? He feels “There are probably two or three novels; the first two that come to mind are *Spectrum* and *The Line of Dreams*. There are very different genres, the first is a detective story and the second cosmo-fantasy. Both are from different genres.”

A reader new to Sergey’s works can find both wonder and variety. The *Night Watch* series though is still the best introduction for new readers to the author. This book provides the best example of Sergey’s creative process and is the most accessible as it has been translated into the English, Chinese, Japanese, German and French languages among others.

The settings for his books have always been a combination of something real and imaginary. As Sergey travels he is inspired and picks up ideas from the places he visits. One unintended effect of his visit here, he shares, is the island might probably be part of another book setting! Of course, said the author, the description might be modified but readers would definitely be able to tell that Singapore was the inspiration!

Background

Sergei Lukyanenko was born in Karatau, Kazakhstan and now lives and works in Moscow. A trained psychiatrist, he has won many awards for science fiction and fantasy novels. Many of his books are also bestsellers. He started writing fiction in the late 1980s, making a breakthrough in 1998 with his first Watch book, *Night Watch*, an urban fantasy novel. In 1999 he became the youngest winner of the Aelita Prize for science fiction writing and for contributions to the development of the fantasy genre. Some of his books have been adapted into board and computer games.

The Author’s Official Page

<http://lukianenko.ru/eng/>

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Russia-Singapore Vibrant Cultural Kaleidoscope

The representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo in the Republic of Singapore is a unique link in the development of international contacts between the various regions in Russia and Singapore in the scientific, technical, cultural, economic, and educational fields. Rossotrudnichestvo can also directly organize tours of artists of any sphere, film screenings, and museum exhibitions.

Another interesting driver in helping nourish this two-way cultural interchange has been the contributions of Russian representatives of creative professions who live in the Republic of Singapore. It is felt that the Russian diaspora in Singapore can also play a pivotal role in developing relations between Russia and Singapore via this creative medium. For example, these creative souls can organize music lessons where Singaporeans can learn the techniques of playing the piano, violin, cello, flute or classical guitar; then there’s also the area of art, lessons in which can reveal and convey the basics of fine art, introduce one to, say, the understanding of beauty and various styles of the Russian school of painting. The projects of Singapore’s Russian diaspora also include a dancing studio, a school of Russian ballet, a ballroom dance studio, fencing school, an academy of rhythmic gymnastics, a community of bayanists and accordionists, and a synchronized swimming club.

With the opening of the Russian Cultural Center, the embassy in Singapore plans to organize joint events which can be a platform to talk about the diversity of Russian culture, as well as to promote the development of bilateral relations between the two countries. Given the situation of social-distancing that has come into the force because of the Covid pandemic and people spending more time in their homes, the Russian embassy on its official website <http://sgp.rs.gov.ru/ru>, and also on the official Instagram page https://www.instagram.com/rossot_singapore, offers links to all online resources of Russian theaters, museums, and educational projects. Plans are also afoot to shortly broadcast movies online in English on the embassy’s website so that people can steep themselves in the wonders of the culture of Russia.

Magical Moscow

By Lily Ong

Christmas returned for Lily Ong and her five-year-old daughter, Tess, when they travelled to the Russian capital in January. Illuminated under canopies of light, Moscow glows majestically and reads like pages from its historical diary. Although modern in every sense, Moscow evokes an old-world ambience that is nothing short of mesmerising

T rue to our minimalist style, my daughter and I landed in Moscow with just two carry-ons in January this year. We swiftly made our way to the metro station where I studied the comprehensible route map. Available for purchase was the Troika card - a reusable contactless card that enables one to travel on the bus, tram, trolleybus, and metro in Moscow with ease; nonetheless, I wasn't inconvenienced without one as mobile pay was accepted everywhere we went, including small shops, vending machines, and public transport.

Upon boarding our train, strangers were so quick to offer their seats that we knew at once we were in a foreign land. In fact, mothers with accompanying children seldom find themselves without a seat on a Moscow train.

Smolenskaya Station

In less than 30 minutes, we pulled into Smolenskaya Station. If we hadn't known better, we would have thought we had arrived at an art gallery.

Located eight meters underground with stately marble columns, Smolenskaya Station was quite a sight to take in. Images of soldiers decorate the walls and pavilions, promptly evoking feelings of patriotism for those in their motherland.

The escalator hall was warmly lit both by candelabra on the pylons and lamps beneath its arches. Even the ceiling was covered in ornate decorations that divulge stories we craved to know. As we craned our necks to admire it all, my daughter spotted a hammer and sickle



(Top) Lily and Tess enjoy the Moscow winter fairy tale setting. (Above): The Russians celebrate Christmas in January!

symbol similar to one she had seen earlier on an Aeroflot aircraft. "This one has no wings," she contrasted.

No sooner had we exited the station, an elderly lady marched up to us. Now, I've heard of the Babushka, the Russian grandmother, who would not hesitate to openly call out what she finds disagreeable. As I braced myself for what's to come, she smilingly gave me a thumbs-up while keeping her eyes glued to my daughter. I thanked her promptly in Russian as the little one shrugged her shoulders in bewilderment.

To acquaint ourselves with our surroundings, we elected to walk to our apartment. We could have done without the sturdy gust of wind at our back, but at least it wasn't blasting at us from the front. Across the street, glistening golden domes beamed at us and brought to mind what Mr. Lee Hsien Loong had said in the year 2016. "I look forward to the day when we see at least one Russian-Orthodox golden dome in the skyline of Singapore," the Prime Minister had declared.

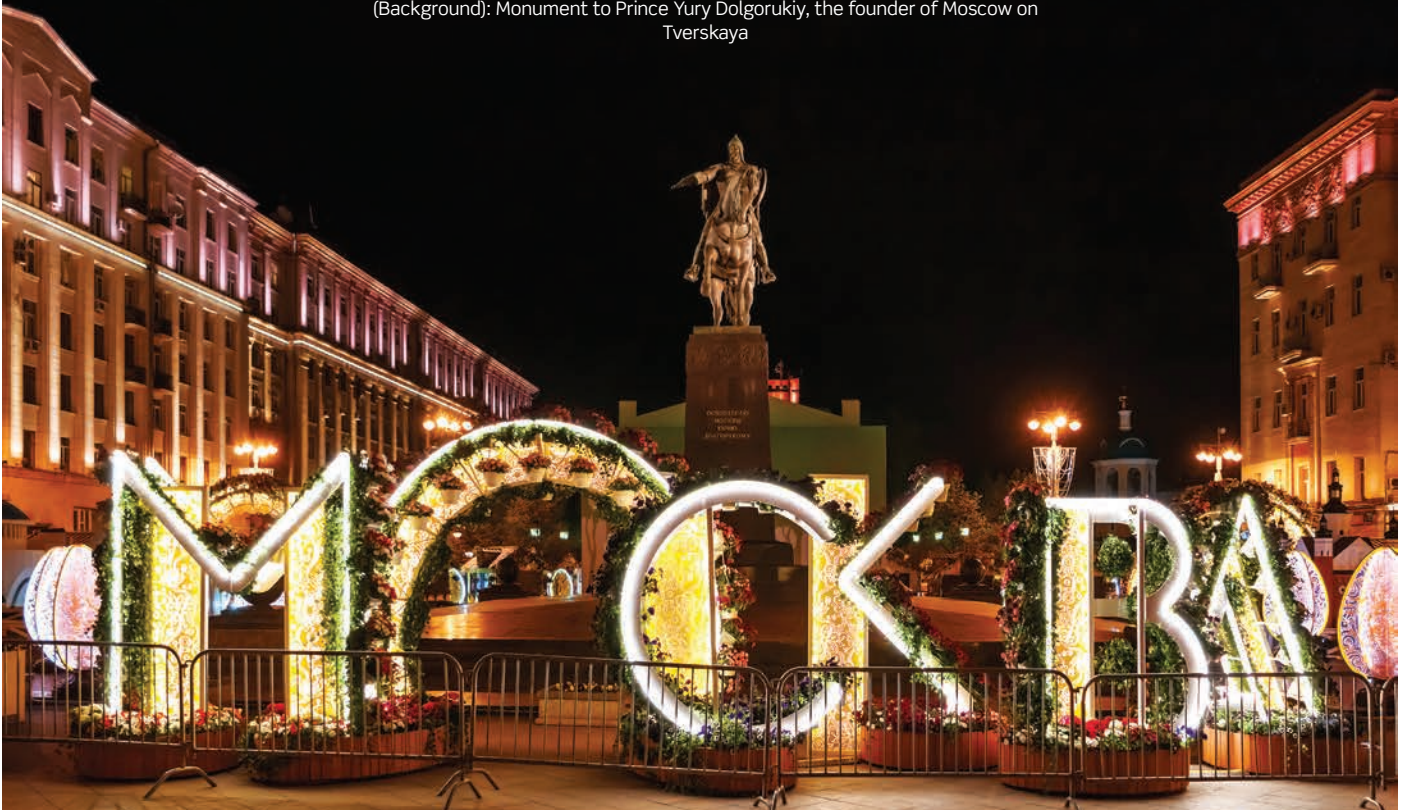
Since his communiqué, that day has drawn nearer. The year 2018 saw President Vladimir Putin making his first-ever visit to Singapore. His visit was well noted not just by the ASEAN leaders who welcomed him appreciatively and enthusiastically, but a global audience who saw that foreign efforts at isolating Russia has foundered.

Sportsmaster Stopover

Having left her gloves behind at our previous destination, we popped into Sportsmaster in



(Above): Moscow Historical Museum on Red Square at night
(Background): Monument to Prince Yuri Dolgorukiy, the founder of Moscow on Tverskaya





(Above row from l): Grandeur of the Smolenskaya Station; variety of food including kebabs to pelmeni (Russian dumplings) served with smetana (sour cream)

Smolenskaya Square to get my daughter a new pair. With all the familiar sports brands from Puma to New Balance, Fila to Skechers, the store reminded me of Sports Authority in America, except its footprint is more international with retail outlets in Belarus, China, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan as well. The prices were friendly, and we would have loved to grab some skates, but resisted tagging more weight to our luggage.

With warm gloves on her hands, my daughter and I resumed our journey only to be lured into yet another store strategically displaying succulent stacks of meat on a rotating vertical rotisserie in its glass window.

The Döner Kebab came with generous servings of fresh vegetables and meat shavings so tender they literally melted in our mouths. Our eyes were inescapably drawn to the rows of sweet pastries divinely paraded. My daughter ordered herself a long, crispy torpedo-shaped dessert that I successfully negotiated a few bites of afterwards. It reminded me of the Torpil Tatlisi in Turkey, except this was filled with hazelnut chocolate cream. Our bill was a pleasing RUB 200 with drinks included.

Tummies filled and content, we checked into our apartment for a much-needed and well-rested nap.

In the evening, we met up with local friends at a Georgian restaurant. There was no specific reason for selecting a Georgian restaurant other than its proximity to where we were. Besides, the temperature had plummeted by the evening, so we were not up for venturing very far.

Our visit to Georgia a couple of years back taught us that Kinkhali is a must-have. We ate them with our bare hands by sucking the juice at first bite. Careful not to burn our tongues, we did so gingerly. The tough tops were deposed off and we counted them to determine how many we had each gobbled. I seldom come in first in life, but I did this night.

The next morning, I went for my first meeting with my daughter in tow. It would have been much easier to summon a Yandex ride, the local ride-hailing service, but I was feeling ambitious and desirous of experiencing mass transport in Moscow. All in all, it must have taken four transfers between trains and buses for a total of 1 hour. The natives on the street were extremely helpful even if they didn't always concur on directions.

We were a tad early for our meeting and needed to shelter from the cold. We located the nearest entrance, but like everywhere else on the highly secured grounds, an access card was required for entry. We clearly did not look like we belonged, but the compassionate security guard let us through so that we could avail ourselves of the restroom. Our chaperon soon came and guided us to the meeting place.

While the adults went about our conversation at the conference table, my daughter unearthed greater interest in the Christmas tree at a corner. Instead of a train set one would typically find under an American Christmas tree, she found country flags encircling the base of the tree. It didn't take her long to find the Singapore flag as she waved it in the air and carolled "Count on Me, Singapore" in soft decibels.

Our next meeting brought us back to the city center. My daughter's tea etiquette went out the window as soon as she saw the exquisite tea set. Adorned in the popular blue cobalt net design said to be inspired by an 18th-century tea service belonging to Empress Elizabeth, tea sets of such motifs were first produced after the siege of Leningrad in the 1940s.

It was just as well she kept herself occupied during the meeting; leaving us undisturbed, she poured one glass after another for an endless line of imaginary patrons she had to serve.

Winter Fairytale

On our last evening, we found ourselves wholly mesmerised in a winter fairytale.

Starting at Dorogomilovsky Christmas Market, we marvelled at a Guinness record-claiming glowing ball boasting 9.5 km of LED lights at 17 m tall. Next to it was a labyrinth fashioned in a Russian map filled with exhibitions dedicated to different epochs of Russian history. Many Soviet posters donned the showcase to take its visitors back in time.

There were many stalls selling traditional Russian Christmas food like the Kholodet, a jellied meat dish, and the Kulebyaka, a crispy puff pastry filled with salmon, onion, and mushroom. The latter has a history rooted in the 1800s, when fish was an essential part of the pre-revolutionary Russian cuisine as a meat substitute during Russian-Orthodox fasting periods.

For a city characteristically blanketed in snow during this time of the year, Moscow was visibly bereft of snow this year. Nonetheless, giant ice slides, referred to as "Kremlin Hills" by the locals, could be found near the grand palace in long slithers of white.

As our time was short, we had to pass over our desire to attend an ice ballet performance for which Moscow is famous. Nonetheless, we chanced upon a rostrum on Tverskaya Ploshchad where a theatrical show was live in action. There is nothing that raises the atmosphere of Christmas like a staged fairy tale, and this one indubitably lived up to its name. After the show, the affable elf, though not quite as diminutive as portrayed in Christmas tales, invited my daughter onstage for some complimentary photography.

We continued to thread our way through charmingly decorated stalls as we admired Matryoshka dolls (Russian nesting dolls), Khokhloma (Russian decorative painting) toys painted in vivid colours of red, black and gold, Orenburg shawls (Russian knitted lace textile using goat down), Russian jewelry and trinket boxes depicting fairytale scenes, and Valenki (Russian footwear) among a vast assortment of attractive offerings.



Many examples of the contrasts of the old and new in Moscow:
In the background the Church of Nikolaya Chudotvortsya Tverskoy

***"I look forward to the day when we see at least one Russian-Orthodox golden dome in the skyline of Singapore."
- Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong 2016***

Aromas of ginger cookies, waffles, donuts, coffee, sausages, and pancakes filled the air while we walked, inducing new pangs of hunger. A craving for hot dumplings hit and our mission became one of combing the market for such.

We did locate a dumpling vendor but the queue was long, so we bid farewell to the dazzling, magical Christmas scene for our onward journey to the airport. Our auspicious star must have followed because halfway at Paveletskaya metro station, we found a restaurant offering Peljmeni!

These are Russian meat dumplings filled with garlic, onion, and meat of your choice (I opted for beef). Savoury and moulded in just the right size, these appetisers were the perfect companions to my soup. My daughter went for the Russian potato and mushroom croquette, and to my relief, did not attempt to pick out the mushroom therein.

Right before entering the gate for the Aeroexpress train that would whisk us to the airport in mere 45 minutes for RUB 500, our blessed star kept up its sparkle with a chocolate specialty store before

our eyes! My daughter and I have never let a day go by without consuming our prized addiction, and Russian chocolates rank supreme for us in preference and taste.

As soon as we got on the train, she popped a piece of the confectionary creation into her mouth. I cupped one in my hands and held it close to my nose. With gentle brushes, I warmed it up and inhaled its luscious aroma deeply. "Surely," I thought, "when Winston Churchill spoke of Russia as a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma", he was referring to one of these..."

Long Beach: Singapore's Classic Seafood Restaurant Has Come A Long Way

First started in 1946, it has become a household name, a must-go-to dining spot for quality seafood and local delights famous among Singaporeans and visitors to the island



A page from the past - the original restaurant at Bedok Rest House

Think of all the classic seafood favourites that Singapore is famous for such as its Chilli Crabs and, more often than not, seafood lovers think of Long Beach. The restaurant is also well known for being the creators of more exotic fare such as Alaskan King Crab, Australian Lobster, Geoduck, Dungeness Crab and many other seafood delights. These have now become part of many other seafood restaurants' offerings.

Currently Long Beach has five outlets islandwide and the restaurant is still dedicated to offering the finest, freshest seafood. It is no wonder that its many signature dishes are the stuff of many a mouth-watering feast. All of its premium seafood is brought in by air, available for selection from the temperature-controlled glass tanks that are a fixture in all its outlets, and always cooked *à la minute*.

Long Beach has notched up plenty of awards and also hosted many international celebrities and foreign diplomats, such as, Lady Gaga, Chris Hemsworth, Morgan Freeman, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Many of its outlets have won Best Asian Restaurants awards and received

excellent ratings including online travel portals such as *TripAdvisor*.

RECOMMENDED ★★★★★

CLASSIC WHITE PEPPER LIVE ALASKAN KING CRAB

The prized Alaskan "King of Crabs", weighing up to 6 kg each, can easily feed a table of 10. The succulent, sweet flesh gets a dash of local flavour with an exuberantly flavoured white pepper sauce.

BEST ORIGINAL BLACK PEPPER CRAB

This famous dish was created by Long Beach Seafood in 1982, which has since become one of the most well-loved dishes in Singapore. The Crab is coated with a luscious black pepper sauce after being stir-fried, retaining its sweet succulent meat and has also obtained remarkable reputation amongst gourmards.

FAMOUS CHILLI CRAB

Long Beach Seafood's chilli crab is one of the top iconic dishes in Singapore for seafood lovers! The greater level of its spiciness sets this dish of the restaurant apart from many others. The gravy, an impeccable combination of spiciness, sweetness and saltiness,

complementing perfectly with Man Tou and crab is just so unreal.

GOLDEN STRIPE LIVE LOBSTER

Stir-fried with sweet flakes, enhancing the natural flavours of the succulent flesh, this brings out the exquisite taste and texture of the magnificent lobster.

Where to Find

○ Long Beach @ STEVENS

(Tel: 6445 8833). 30 Stevens Road. Next to Hotel Mercure Singapore) #01-10

○ Long Beach @ DEMPSEY

(Tel: 6323 2222). Left turn to Dempsey via Holland Rd (before Pierce Rd) 25 Dempsey Road

○ Long Beach IMM

(Tel: 6566 9933) Level 3, next to Rooftop Garden #03-07 IMM Building, Jurong East 21

○ Long Beach UDMC

(Tel: 6488 3636) #01-04 East Coast Seafood Centre

○ Long Beach KING

(Tel: 6344 7722) Next to Kallang Park McDonald's / KFC, opp Mountbatten MRT (via Exit B)

○ Long Beach @ Robertson Quay

(Tel: 6336 3636). Next to Intercontinental Robertson Quay) The Quayside, 60 Robertson Quay, #01-14



LONG BEACH

CREATOR OF THE ORIGINAL AND THE
BEST BLACK PEPPER CRAB OF SINGAPORE
A PREMIUM SEAFOOD RESTAURANT



Classic White Pepper
Live Alaskan King Crab

A SEAFOOD AFFAIR

If you haven't tasted seafood at Long Beach, you haven't tasted REAL seafood!



Best Original Black Pepper Crab



Live Geoduck Sashimi with
Superior Stock Steamboat



Golden Stripe Live Lobster



Live Southern Australian Lobster
Sashimi with Superior Stock Steamboat



Famous Chilli Crab



Deep Fried Live Estuary Grouper
with Mango in Thai Style



Olam is re-imagining global agriculture and food systems

Established in 1989, Olam is a leading food and agri-business supplying food, ingredients, feed and fibre to over 19,800 customers worldwide.



Opportunity Russia

Olam Russia has transcended boundaries in Russian agriculture, with extensive operations spanning the Penza, Rostov and Moscow regions. Outspan International Ltd is our Russian subsidiary and one of the largest suppliers of raw materials and semi-finished products to the food processing industry in Russia. We supply cocoa beans and products, milk ingredients, as well as green and instant coffee to major national and international brands.

The Russian Dairy Company, or Rusmolco has had a significant positive impact on the development of the Penza region in Russia. In fact, Rusmolco's dairy and agri projects have become among the key locomotives driving the agri sector of the region forward through dairy and crop production, logistics infrastructure development and growing the supply of high quality agricultural raw materials to meet the growing domestic demand. This is one example of how Olam is re-imagining global agriculture by putting sustainability at the heart of our business.