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Kaku Helps Rostik Celebrate 30 Years

By Derek Andersen

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Kaku first came to Russia in 1982.

Rostik Group president Rostislav Ordovsky-Tanayevsky Blanco celebrated his company's 30th anniversary by inviting about 300 "partners, friends and the best employees" Thursday to hear popular U.S. science evangelist Michio Kaku speak about the future of technology.

Ordovsky-Tanayevsky Blanco is a Venezuelan-born entrepreneur of Russian descent, whose company operates or franchises the Il Patio, Planet Sushi and 1-2-3 Cafe chains and is the licensee of the T.G.I. Friday's and Sibirskaya Corona brands.

He was discussing "the future, or lack of future, of Russia" with AFK Sistema board chairman Leonid Melamud over dinner when Melamud mentioned Kaku.

Ordovsky-Tanayevsky Blanco was inspired and invited the scientist to Moscow.

Kaku told The Moscow Times that he has been to Russia repeatedly since his first visit as a guest of the Academy of Sciences in 1982.

"I met Andrei Sakharov," Kaku said with a certain satisfaction. He just completed a 10-city tour in support of his latest book, "Physics of the Future," for which he interviewed 13 Nobel Prize winners.

Kaku is also a professor of theoretical physics at City University of New York. He hosts a weekly television show on the U.S. Science Channel and has a radio show carried by 140 stations.

Entrepreneurship is the weak link in Russia's future, Kaku said, due to the barriers that businesses face in the country.

"Science is the engine of prosperity. Stop the brain drain, make them say 'I want to stay,'" he said, adding that entrepreneurs not only create jobs, they create industries.

Ordovsky-Tanayevsky Blanco, whose company went public in 2007 and reported an 8.7 percent year-on-year increase in profits last month, had apparently been speaking to the scientist about more abstract topics.

The company's anniversary, he told the audience, speaking in English with a light Spanish accent, was "just an excuse to acknowledge the forces in life that make the improbable or impossible become true."

Kaku focused on technology in his lecture — which was clearly not tailored to a Russian audience. He mentioned the country only once.

"We eat better than the tsars of Russia," Kaku said, illustrating the fall in the average price of food in the last 150 years and the advantages of intellectual capitalism over commodity capitalism.

But Russia was conspicuous by its absence.

Issues that might have been familiar to Kaku's Moscow audience, such as Glonass, Skolkovo, the income gap and health care reform, were dwarfed by their global equivalents as described by the professor — a GPS-guided driverless car being developed by Google, the influence of the rising middle classes in China and India and the lengthening life expectancy in Japan and Western Europe as a driving force in the development of robotics.

But Ordovsky-Tanayevsky Blanco preferred to look backward when talking about his business experience. "When I was 20," he told the newspaper, coming to Russia "was not a desire or a dream. It was a legend."

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