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Russia Should Take the Road To Indonesia

By Dian Wirengjurit

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Russia and Indonesia have a combined population of 377 million people, share 5.5 percent of the world's gross domestic product, possess huge potential in natural resources and both are on the path toward democracy and free market capitalism. Indonesia is in dire need of infrastructure development, and Russia is a technologically advanced nation.

The potential for mutually beneficial political and economic ties is huge, but much more has to be done to develop these ties.

Both know very well that tens of thousands of miles separate them and that the road that connects the two was constructed more than 60 years ago. In the early 1990s, this road started to be repaired, until it was completed in 2003 when their two leaders signed the Declaration on Principles of Friendly and Partnership Relations for the 21st century. But now, the figures tell a different story.

The trade volume surpassed $1 billion in 2010, and both nations hope to reach $2 billion by the end of 2011. Compared to Russia's trade with some of Indonesia's smaller neighboring countries, this figure does not represent the true potential of the countries' economic cooperation. The Russia-

Malaysian trade volume reached $4 billion in 2011. Further, while most Russians enjoy drinking tea from Vietnam or Sri Lanka, Indonesia produces more.

In tourism, 100,000 Russians enjoyed the beauty of Indonesia last year, compared with 80,000 in 2010. But this figure is minor compared with Thailand, where about 300,000 Russians enjoyed its sunny tropical beaches in 2011.

What has kept the Russian-Indonesian relationship from reaching its full potential? First, both Indonesians and Russians hold stereotypes about each other rooted in the Cold War. Second, both countries are happy enough to maintain good trade relations with traditional partners like Japan, China, the United States and Western Europe, and they haven't yet explored new opportunities beyond these established ones.

The road from Russia to Indonesia is indeed paved, so both countries simply need to travel more often along it.

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