By Invitation

Doors are open for Russia to play major role in Asia

But will Moscow seize opportunity presented by changing power dynamics in the region?

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For The Straits Times

In travelling to Singapore to elevate the Russian engagement with Asia, President Vladimir Putin was laying the groundwork for a summit. Unlike Europe, where the relationship between Russia and the West has been poisoned by the Ukraine crisis, Russia has long been a part of both the European and Asian continents. This is why the relationship between Russia and the West is important, as Russia has always been in the strategic interest of both Europe and Asia. Yet, there never was any symmetry between the two. Russia's demographic and economic strength was matched by a European superpower, and its history was shaped by conflict and collaboration with the West.

But if coping with the West has always preoccupied Russia, the alliance of the East never disappeared. Like its Western peers, Russia expanded into Asia in the 19th century. If the Western powers took the maritime route, it is not Russia moved eastward overland to Siberia and the Far East. It is true that Russia has never felt comfortable in the region but has often been a strategic partner for China, India, and other Asian powers. The relationship between Russia and the East has always been complex, and the Kremlin has often been on the receiving end of criticism from the Western powers.

The current geopolitical landscape in Asia is shaped by the rise of China, India, and other emerging powers. Russia's strategic advantage in the region is derived from its ability to act as a counterweight to the US and its allies. The Kremlin has been able to leverage its strategic position in the region to gain leverage in its negotiations with the West.

For Russia, the opportunity presented by the changing power dynamics in the region is a chance to re-establish its position as a major player in Asia. Putin's visit to Singapore is an important step in this direction. By engaging with the region, Russia can present itself as a partner that is committed to promoting stability, cooperation, and economic growth in the region.

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