RUSSIA’S GEOPOLITICS

Led in ‘wrong direction’

HK ex-Governor on why the country isn’t in the ranks of China or India

While China and India are key global players today, Russia is not part of the ranks of emerging world powers, according to Lord Chris Patten (picture), the former European Union Commissioner for External Relations.

“I think China, India and South-east Asia are going to shape the 21st century, but I am not sure in what sense Russia is going to,” said Mr Patten. He was responding to a question asked by a member of the audience while delivering his lecture, “Shifting Patterns of Global Power”, at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy yesterday.

“India and China will play a major role in the next decades in shaping the world and unless the transatlantic community — America and Europe — recognise that and adjust to that, then there is hardly a single problem we will be able to tackle satisfactorily,” said Mr Patten, who was the last British Governor of Hong Kong. He added, however, that patterns in the global order were unchanged, with America still the only superpower.

“I think that Russia, despite the braggadocio of the last few years, has been led in a fundamentally wrong direction,” said Mr Patten, who is a member of the British House of Lords.

“With the collapse of the price of oil and with increasing difficulty in extracting gas in the quantities required to meet contractual obligations, I think Russia is going to have quite a lot of trouble in the next few years in holding its social infrastructure together,” said Mr Patten, who is also the chancellor of Oxford and Newcastle Universities.

He said Russia is not operating in “the way a modern state should”, adding “we have to try to persuade Russia that it has a better role in the world than simply making trouble”.

“It should settle for being a part of the broader economy... part of the European family... that doesn’t feel that it has to apply pressure in a sort of tsarist way over its neighbours, in effect limiting their sovereignty.”

Russia fought a short war with Georgia when the nation’s troops moved into Georgia on Aug 8 to push back a Georgian military attempt to retake South Ossetia province, whose breakaway administration had long enjoyed support from Moscow.

Russian forces have withdrawn from most of Georgia under an EU-brokered ceasefire, but not from South Ossetia and another rebel province.