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Syria Again Says Oil Deal With Kremlin Near Completion

By The Moscow Times

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Syria is preparing to complete a deal with the Kremlin to secure much-needed oil products to keep its economy and military running, the head of a Syrian delegation to Moscow said, weeks after he said an agreement had been reached.

"It was an agreement in principle reached during our last visit," Syrian Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Qadri Jamil said at a news conference Tuesday.

On Aug. 3 Jamil told reporters that an agreement had been reached for Syria to export crude to Russia in exchange for refined oil products.

Two separate Syrian delegations have visited Moscow this month in order to bargain for crucial economic aid, including a loan, though Jamil said it was too early to go into the details of any such loan.

Russia has remained silent on the issue of an oil-for-oil-products swap deal, which could raise questions on the extent to which it might extend help to Assad's government.

Syria's traditional suppliers have pulled out, leading to shortages in gasoline, diesel and oil fuels, some of which are used to run Syrian tanks.

The Wall Street Journal earlier this month reported that Syria had plans to use Russian banks as part of a scheme to get around Western sanctions on oil and financial transactions.

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