

Russian Teen Powerlifting Champ Heads to War-Torn Syria

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Maryana Naumova, the world's strongest teenage girl, during a visit to Donbass, Ukraine.

A Russian teenager known as the world's strongest girl has traveled to Syria at the invitation of the wife of the war-torn country's president Bashar Assad, the powerlifter said Monday.

In a YouTube video published Monday on her VKontakte page, 16-year-old Maryana Naumova said her week-long visit would include meetings with students, athletes and female members of Syria's special forces who “are defending their motherland.”

Naumova — who set a new world record in March by bench pressing 150 kilograms — said she had been invited by Syrian first lady Asma Assad and was hoping to meet the country's leader.

“I have a small gift for Bashar Assad,” Naumova said in the video.

Naumova later told Govorit Moskva radio station the gift was a watch that had belonged to her grandfather.

Russia has been one of Assad's staunchest allies since civil war broke out in the country.

Western leaders have accused him of committing atrocities against his own people and say he needs to step down to enable a resolution to the conflict.

The patriotic Russian teen has already made several visits to parts of the world that enjoy a closer relationship with her native country than with Western countries, including eastern Ukraine's Donbass region, where pro-Russian rebels are fighting government troops, and North Korea.

At a powerlifting event in the U.S. earlier this year, Naumova told action hero-turned-politician Arnold Schwarzenegger she hoped he would become U.S. president so that he could change the course of U.S.-Russian relations, the Argumenty i Fakty newspaper reported at the time.

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