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Syrian Leader to Visit Moscow Next Month – Russian Deputy PM

By AFP

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Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader Ahmed al-Sharaa arrives for a meeting with visiting Druze officials from Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) in Damascus on Dec. 22, 2024. **AFP**

Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa is to visit Moscow next month, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak announced in Damascus on Tuesday, hailing a new page in ties after the overthrow of longtime ally Bashar al-Assad.

"We place great importance on the coming visit to Moscow of the Syrian president in October to participate in the Russian-Arab summit," Novak said, adding that the trip would "strengthen bilateral cooperation."

"We are here with a large delegation... to open a new page in our relations," he added during a meeting with Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani, calling Syria "a promising regional partner."

State news agency SANA said talks would focus on "the economy, security, defense and politics."

Shaibani said that Syria and Russia were opening a new page "based on respect," welcoming economic cooperation with Moscow and calling for any foreign presence to "help Syrians build their future."

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Novak also suggested Russia could act as a mediator with Israel, which has carried out hundreds of strikes on Syria since Assad's ouster, most recently on Monday according to Syrian state media.

"I wish to draw your attention to the unique possibility of negotiations that Russia has by maintaining contacts with the leaders of Israel and all ethnic groups in Syria," he said.

"We propose using this factor to have a stabilizing influence on the situation in Syria," he said, adding that Moscow and partners including Qatar were also discussing humanitarian aid to Syria and reconstruction in its energy sector.

Uncertainty has clouded the fate of Russia's naval base in Tartus and its air base at Hmeimim since Assad's ouster.

Neither Novak nor Shaibani, who in July became the first senior official of the Islamist-led transitional government to visit Russia, referred to the bases.

In January, Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and a delegation made the first trip to Syria by Russian officials after the toppling of Assad, who fled to Russia.

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