

Lebanese DM to visit Moscow to discuss mil cooperation

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BEIRUT, December 7 (Itar-Tass) - Russian-Lebanese military cooperation will be elevated to a new level when Lebanese Defence Minister Ilias Murr pays a visit to Moscow in mid-December.

"Russia is a serious and honest partner who doesn't set restrictions for military and technological retooling of the Lebanese armed forces," Murr said on Saturday after talks with Mikhail Dmitriev, the director of the Federal Service for Military and Technological Cooperation.

The Lebanese defence minister said that in Moscow he was going to discuss all aspects of partnership with Russia with an aim to increase the defence capability of the Lebanese army.

In the meantime, Dmitriev told reporters that Russia was interested in supporting stability in Lebanon and in the Middle East.

"The Lebanese army should be strong in order to be able to fulfil its mission. Military-technological cooperation with the Lebanon will give a new impetus to bilateral ties," Dmitriev went on to say.

The 72,000-strong Lebanese army has T-54 tanks and Russian-made howitzers on service. That weapons was handed over to it after the 1975-1990 civil war while paramilitary units were being disarmed. The Lebanese side would like to modernize its air defences and increase the number of helicopters and armoured vehicles, sources at the Lebanese army Chief of Staff said.

Russia and Lebanon established close military ties in 2006. Russia was one of the first countries to respond to the Lebanese government's call to restore the country's southern regions that had been destroyed during Israel's air bombardments.

The Russian construction battalion built nine road bridges during its two-month mission to Lebanon. The Russian military builders restored the most difficult sections of transport routes. The Lebanese authorities and the population appreciated their work.

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