

Putin seeks to shore up ties on visit to 'friendly' Kazakhstan

AFP- Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Kazakhstan on Wednesday for a two-day trip aimed at shoring up ties with his Central Asian ally as tensions mount over the Ukraine war. Kazakhstan is a member of the Moscow-led CSTO security alliance but has expressed concern about the almost three-year conflict, which Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has refused to condone.

In an article published in Russia's Izvestia newspaper ahead of Putin's visit, Tokayev emphasised his country's support for "peaceful dialogue", without mentioning Ukraine.

Putin praised Kazakhstan's "close (to Russian) cultural, spiritual and moral values" in an article published in a state-run Kazakh paper, saying he was ready to further develop "friendly and allied relations" with Astana.

Trade ties between the two countries have frayed in recent months, with Moscow banning some Kazakh agricultural exports a day after the Central Asian state refused to join BRICS.

Putin has made expanding the alliance of emerging economies a pillar of Russia's foreign policy, touting BRICS as a powerful counterweight to what he sees as a global Western "hegemony".

Putin's visit comes as tensions between Moscow and the West flare over the Ukraine war, with Russia firing an experimental hypersonic missile at its neighbour last week and Kyiv firing US- and UK-supplied long-range missiles at Russia for the first time.

In September, Tokayev called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, warning that escalation of the war would lead to

“irreparable consequences for the whole of humanity”.

– Ukraine on agenda –

While Putin’s international travels have been limited since Russia’s all-out military offensive on Ukraine in 2022, he has been a regular visitor to Central Asia.

Kazakhstan is a longstanding military and economic partner of Russia and has a 7,500-kilometre (4,650-mile) border with its giant neighbour.

The two leaders are expected to discuss trade and energy ties, as well as the construction of Kazakhstan’s first nuclear power station that Russia’s Rosatom is in the running to build.

Kazakhstan accounts for about 43 percent of world uranium production but has no nuclear reactors itself.

Putin said Wednesday that Rosatom was “ready for new large-scale projects with Kazakhstan”.

The two countries are also expected to sign several documents on Wednesday, as well as make a statement to the media, according to Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov.

On Thursday, Putin and other leaders from the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) are scheduled to meet in Astana for a security summit.

Ukraine will be firmly on the agenda, with leaders expected to discuss “the West’s permission to strike long-range missiles deep into the Russian Federation”, the TASS news agency reported, citing a source.

Notably absent from the meeting will be Armenia, which suspended its membership in the alliance over frustration with Moscow’s failure to side with it in its standoff with Azerbaijan.

Ushakov said Tuesday that Armenia remained a fully-fledged member of the alliance and that it could return at any moment.

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