

Russia says president's Latin America tour not aimed against U.S.

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Russia's foreign minister rejected on Wednesday media allegations that President Dmitry Medvedev's upcoming November tour of Latin American countries is aimed against the United States.

Medvedev will take part in the November 22-23 APEC summit in Lima, and is expected to pay official visits to Brazil, as well as Venezuela and Cuba, whose leaderships strongly oppose U.S. influence in the region.

Sergei Lavrov, who is currently in Colombia, said: "I have read Colombian media reports, and discussed them with my colleague Jaime Bermudez. Of course, when the Russian president's visit is seen as targeted against the U.S., this is just a race for sensationalist news. If this will help to sell boost Colombian newspaper sales, then at least there's some use in it."

"But seriously, such assessments are a residue of the Cold War era, when people say that anything that benefits Washington is bad for Moscow, and vice versa," he said.

Colombia's pro-U.S. president, Alvaro Uribe, has been strongly criticized by Venezuela, one of the countries Medvedev is set to visit. Uribe has been branded "Bush's poodle" by President Hugo Chavez, who has also described Colombia as "the Israel of Latin America."

Speaking on the joint naval exercises between Russia and Venezuela, to be held later this month, Lavrov said Russia "made no secret of its military and technical cooperation" with all its partners, and that the Colombian defense minister was informed of the drills during his visit to Russia.

Also addressing reporters after the talks, Bermudez said that Colombia is keen to expand cooperation with Russia.

"Without doubt, the U.S. is an important partner for Colombia in trade, and we also have projects that help us achieve success in the struggle against drug trafficking and organized crime. But Colombia has always said that these relations do not exclude ties with other countries," he said.

"We would like to cooperate actively with Russia in the political, trade, economic and investment spheres, and we plan to actively work to expand the possibilities for our cooperation."

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