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Gaddafi offers to host Russian naval base

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Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi is in Moscow with an offer to host a naval base in his country, the daily Kommersant has reported. The paper said the move would provide Libya with a 'guarantee of non-aggression' from the United States.

MOSCOW - Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, starting his first visit to post-Soviet Russia on Friday, will discuss opening a Russian naval base in Libya to counterbalance U.S. interests in the region, a paper reported.

Gaddafi, who last visited then Soviet Russia in 1985, is expected to discuss purchases of Russian arms and energy cooperation during his three-day visit.

The business daily Kommersant, quoting a source involved in preparing Gaddafi's visit, said "the colonel has saved the good news for his visit which will mollify the Kremlin's resentment" at a lack of deals with post-sanctions Libya.

"During these talks the colonel intends to raise the issue of opening a base for Russia's navy in the Libyan port of Benghazi," the paper wrote.

"In line with the Libyan leader's plan, Russia's military presence will become a guarantee of non-aggression from the United States which, despite numerous conciliatory gestures, is not in a hurry to embrace Colonel Gaddafi."

Last month, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met Gaddafi in Libya, the first such visit in 55 years, in a move symbolising the end of years of enmity.

Russia, enjoying an unprecedented economic boom, is keen to project its renewed power, and a flotilla of Russian warships led by a nuclear-powered missile cruiser made a stopover off Libya this month on its way to Venezuela to take part in joint naval exercises.

Libya has also hosted a Russian frigate sent to fight piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

Russian media have reported that Gaddafi may be looking to

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buy more than \$2 billion of Russian arms, and that Moscow may be looking for energy deals.

Libya REUTERS Russia

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