

Syrians open to Israel talks

by UPI

DAMASCUS, Syria - Syria is "more than ready" to talk to Israel, a top official said in a newspaper interview published Thursday.

"Were Israel to decide to resume negotiations it would find a ready partner," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem told London's Arabic language Al Hayat newspaper.

The Jerusalem Post said Moallem's statement was the latest in a series of messages from officials in Syria and Israel indicating a willingness to reopen talks.

Also Thursday, Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Shara said he was "not optimistic" about relations between the two countries, claiming to reporters in Damascus that "The American president does not want peace between Israel and Syria." Haaretz reported the comments.

Syria wants the United States to sponsor talks between the two countries, thus ending its isolation of Damascus. U.S. President George Bush has said Israel doesn't need the United States' help in the talks.

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