

TEHRAN – Iran has started construction works for two new nuclear power plants in its southern province of Bushehr, according to the top government official in the region who says the power plants will each be capable of producing 1,080 megawatts of electricity.

Ahmad Mohammadzadeh, who serves as Bushehr's governor-general, said the two major power plants are being designed and built by Iranian engineers and technicians.

TEHRAN -- Chief of General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Muhammad Bagheri has said that the armed forces of Iran and the neighboring Turkiye should continue their cooperation.

In a phone talk with new Turkish defense minister General Yaşar Güler, Bagheri described Iran and Turkiye as "good and strategic neighbors", saying that they share "friendly and peaceful borders", which highlights the necessity of continued cooperation between their armed forces.

VOL NO: LV 11995 TEHRAN / Est.1959

Saturday, June 10, 2023, Khordad 20, 1402, Zil-Qa'dah 21, 1444, Price 300,000 Rials

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Why President Raisi's LatAm Visit is Important

Iran's relations with the Bolivarian bloc of Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and more recently, Brazil, have grown warmer in recent years.

President Ebrahim Raisi will head to Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela on Sunday for a tour of Latin America where documents to expand bilateral cooperation on economic, political and scientific issues will be signed between Iran and the three countries.

The Islamic Republic's involvement with Latin America and the Caribbean has excelled under President Raisi as indicated by a 20-year "cooperation roadmap" signed during a state visit by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to Tehran in June 2022.

The agreement, the two presidents said then, raised bilateral relations to the "strategic" level, under which they agreed to boost ties in energy, science and technology, agriculture and tourism sectors.

In a joint conference, President Raisi said then the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy had always been to have relations with independent countries.

With resistance and anti-hegemony being key constituents of the Bolivarian ethos, the political landscape in Latin America has made a notable shift away from the West in recent years.

It has been marked by a general sense of disillusionment amongst Latin American citizens toward the United States, as well as a rise in anti-liberal attitudes in the region.

This sentiment has been brought about by ongoing economic struggles and dissatisfaction with the liberal policies of recent pro-American governments.

The shift has provided Iran with ample opportunity to expand its relations with Bolivarian countries and look to forge better relations with the countries which have recently re-elected more independent governments, such as Brazil, Chile and Colombia.

At the start of the 21st century, then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad established a close relationship with Venezuelan Hugo Chavez, whose Bolivarian ideology aligned with the values presented by the Islamic Republic.

It was through this partnership that Iran developed alliances with other independent leaders, specifically Ecuador's Rafael Correa and Bolivia's President Evo Morales.

Between 2005 and 2012, more than 270 agreements were signed, including trade agreements on development projects, vehicle manufacturing, energy policies and banking programs.

In 2008, Iran became a member of the Bolivian Alliance for the People of our America (ALBA), the brainchild of Chavez and Cuba's Fidel Castro, as an 'observer state'.

The seeds sown during this period came into fruition in the post-Chavez era in the form of sustained economic cooperation. Current Venezuelan President Maduro has enacted a continued policy of cooperation with Iran, culminating in the 20-year agreement. Iran has signed similar economic cooperation agreements with Cuba, Nicaragua, and the new Bolivian government in Colombia.

Since 2020, Iran has helped repair and overhaul a number of Venezuelan refineries that have suffered from decades of mismanagement, low investments and sanctions.

Iran and Venezuela are both members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Oil, which provides nearly half of the budgets of both Venezuela and Iran, has played a key role in the nature of the economic relations between them.

Under an oil swap agreement signed in 2021, Iran has sent shipments of its heavy crude to help Venezuela ramp up the production of oil and gas to avoid fuel crises that it has seen in recent years.

The level of bilateral cooperation between Iranian and Venezuelan oil companies in terms of exploration and petrochemicals continues to grow, with Tehran announcing assistance in building the platforms for developing oil fields in the Orinoco delta region, estimated at \$4 billion, in return for investments inside Venezuela.

Iran's blossoming relationship with the region continues to hinge upon the strategic cooperation of Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, which are currently subject to broad U.S.-led sanctions.

Tehran wants to weaken America's attempts to isolate it and its allies internationally by building interests and joint capabilities with Latin American countries, as well as the likes of China and Russia.

Economic cooperation between Iran and these nations is set to become even more prevalent in 2023, following the West's failure to bring the U.S. back to compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal and remove sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

President Raisi's planned visit on Sunday is certainly a step in this direction.

Courtesy: Press TV

President Raisi Opens Major Projects



President Raisi and other officials are briefed by Iran Ministry of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash on a new rail link during a ceremony in Tabriz on Thursday.

TEHRAN -- President Ebrahim Raisi on Friday opened a key rail line in northwest Iran that will shorten travel time to the metropolitan city of Tabriz by four hours.

The railway connects Bostanabad to Khavaran some 29 kilometers from Tabriz, covering a distance of 44 kilometers. The section is part of the connection between Khavaran and Miyaneh, which is now as good as com-

plete. The railway connection between Tabriz and Miyaneh has been a hurdle in western Iranian railway transportation for years. Until now, trains had to take a major detour. As a result of the new railway connection, trains can connect between the cities directly and Iran will have a faster domestic logistics channel from East to West.

The rail way line could even

have more potential if the connection from Khavaran to Tabriz is completed, the last missing link.

Amir Ashri, who works for the Iranian firm MAPNA Locomotive, explained that this Miyaneh-Bostanabad-Tabriz project still needs some final touches.

The final section between Khavaran and Tabriz needs to be completed in the future. Once the line has been fully finalized, it will be part of the southern route of the

Silk Road, said Ashri.

The southern route of the New Silk Road runs through Iran and Turkey instead of Kazakhstan and Russia. The railway link between Tabriz and Turkey is already there. If the railway link between Khavaran and Tabriz is completed, the Miyaneh-Bostanabad-Tabriz line is connected to Turkey.

Apart from being part of the southern route of the Silk Road, the railway is also considered as the southern route of the Trans Asia Railways (TAR). Initiated back in the 1950s, TAR envisions a gigantic rail connection between Singapore and Istanbul, extending over a length of 14,080 kilometers.

The southern corridor in TAR aims to create a rail connection over Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand, with extended railways running from China to Southeast Asian countries. In 2006, an extensive Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network was developed, involving 25 countries in the project, with a lengthy document illustrating the to-be-constructed railways for each country.

This agreement encompasses almost all Central Asian countries, China and India, as well as some Republic of Korea and Iran, with the latest development such as China

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Iran Quashes Report of 'Interim Deal' With U.S.

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) – Tehran has roundly rejected reports that Iran and the United States were are concluding an interim agreement under which Iran would curb its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

The outright rebuttal by Iran's UN mission on Thursday came after London-based Middle East Eye (MEE) news and analysis website claimed that the countries were close to clinching such a deal to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The JCPOA was reached in 2015 between Iran and world countries, including the United States. It enabled limited sanction relief for the Islamic Republic, which, in turn, volunteered to change some aspects of its nuclear work.

The U.S., however, left the agreement in 2018 under former president Donald Trump, returning all the sanctions that the deal had lifted.

Negotiations to revive the agreement started in April 2021. The talks have, however, stalled amid Washington's refusal to offer guarantees that it would not ditch the deal again.

"There is no interim deal to replace the JCPOA," said the Iranian mission to the United Nations, adding that no such agreement is on the agenda.

Also on Thursday, a White House National Security Council spokesman rejected the MEE report, calling it false and misleading.

The reported had cited two unnamed sources as saying "the two sides have reached an agreement on a temporary deal to take to their respective superiors."

It claimed that Iran would commit to cease enriching uranium to purity of 60% or above and would continue cooperation with the UN nuclear agency in return for being allowed to export up to 1 million barrels of oil per day and gaining access "to its income and other frozen funds abroad."

Trump's successor Joe Biden has alleged an interest in returning the U.S. to the JCPOA. Biden's administration has, however, not only stopped short of taking any measures that could lift the talks out of its current impasse but has also imposed many rounds of its own sanctions

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Palestinian Resistance Groups Warn: Zionist Plan to Divide Al-Aqsa 'Declaration of War'

TEHRAN – A coalition of Palestinian resistance groups in Gaza has condemned the occupying regime of Israel's attempts to "divide" time and space at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of Al-Quds between Muslims and Jews, decrying the potential step as a declaration of war.

The Palestinian resistance factions said in a joint statement on Thursday evening that the plan proposed by Amit Halevi, a Likud party lawmaker in the Knesset (parliament), will further deteriorate security status in the West Bank and will push it towards explosion.

The groups also held the far-right Zionist cabinet led by prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu fully responsible for the dire repercussions of implementing the highly controversial plan.

They underlined that the entire Palestinian people and resistance groups will not tolerate such a flagrant act of aggression, and will not spare any effort to stop the plan.

"The heinous plot falls within the framework of systematic Judaization schemes that the Zionist authorities have long been pursuing, and are aimed at dividing the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and imposing the regime's control and sovereignty over it," the statement read.

It urged the entire Muslim nation to fulfill their duties and resist the Zionist regime's plots against Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The resistance groups urged Palestinians to flock to Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyards, intensify their resistance against Israeli forces and impose "consequences" on the Zionist regime for its crimes, especially by carrying out retaliatory operations in the 1948-occupied territories.

According to Al-Ayyam daily newspaper, Halevi has suggested allocating the southern part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound to Muslims, while Jewish extremist settlers get the central and northern

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