

Indian FM to Discuss IP Gas Pipeline in Tehran

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Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid is slated to discuss extension of a gas pipeline project which is due to take Iran's rich gas reserves to Pakistan and then to India, during his upcoming visit to Tehran, media reports said.

Khurshid and his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi will talk about the extension of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline in Tehran, the English-language Indian newspaper The Tribune reported on Thursday.

Khurshid is slated to arrive in Tehran on Friday to discuss bilateral ties and mutual cooperation with Iranian senior officials.

The Indian external affairs minister will embark on a three-day visit to Iran today to attend the 17th Joint Iran-India Commission.

Khurshid is the co-chairperson of the Joint Commission along with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi.

Last month, Iranian Oil Ministry Spokesman Alireza Nikzad Rahbar announced that New Delhi has renewed interest in the extension of Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline to India.

"Since India has been motivated by Pakistan's seriousness in construction of the (Iran-Pakistan) peace pipeline, New Delhi is negotiating to join the project," Nikzad Rahbar said.

The Iranian official noted that "there has been considerable progress in the IP gas pipeline, with Iranian contractors starting work on the Pakistani section of the pipeline, after finishing nearly 900 kilometers of the pipeline on Iran's soil".

Last month, Moily emphasized that his country will not halt imports of Iranian crude oil, rejecting recent Western news reports to the contrary.

While noting that unilateral anti-Iran sanctions by the US and the European Union have caused some difficulties for India in terms of insuring Iranian oil shipments, Moily told reporters in New Delhi that his country intends to establish a special fund for insuring oil imports originating from the Islamic Republic.

India, the world's fourth-largest petroleum consumer, is Iran's second largest oil customer after China and purchases around \$12bln worth of Iranian crude every year, about 12 percent of its consumption.

Last month, Iran and Pakistan officially inaugurated the construction phase of a gas pipeline project which is due to take Iran's rich gas reserves to the energy-hungry South Asian nation.

The project kicked off in a ceremony attended by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari at the two countries' shared border region in Iran's Southeastern city of Chabahar.

The 2700-kilometer long pipeline was to supply gas for Pakistan and India which are suffering a lack of energy sources, but India has evaded talks. In 2011, Iran and Pakistan declared they would finalize the agreement bilaterally if India continued to be absent in the meeting.

According to the project proposal, the pipeline will begin from Iran's Assalouyeh Energy Zone in the south and stretch over 1,100 km through Iran. In Pakistan, it will pass through Baluchistan and Sindh but officials now say the route may be changed if China agrees to the project.

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