

Gazprom delegation visits Iran to boost cooperation



A Gazprom delegation headed by Alexey Miller, chairman of the company's Management Committee, paid a working visit to Iran on Tuesday. In the course of the visit, a working meeting was held in Tehran between Miller and Mohsen Paknejad, Iran's Minister of Oil, according to gazprom.com. The meeting addressed matters pertaining to the cooperation in the gas sector. In June 2024, the strategic memorandum on the elaboration of arrangements for supplies of Russian natural gas to Iran was signed with the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) during the visit of Miller to Iran.

Local media reports at the time suggested that Gazprom would supply some 300 million cubic meters per day of gas to Iran under the deal to enable the country to increase its exports via pipelines to Iraq and Turkey.

Russia has been facing an oversupply of natural gas since early 2022 when its exports to Europe came under sanctions due to the war in Ukraine.

Experts say the agreement between the NIGC and Gazprom could turn Iran into a major gas transfer hub in the region once it is fully implemented. Miller also met with Ali Akbar Ahmadian, who serves as the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) on Tuesday, according to IRNA.

It said Miller had traveled to Tehran to follow up on negotiations earlier this month in St. Petersburg between Ahmadian and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Miller also briefed Ahmadian on agreements he had reached with senior Iranian energy sector officials, it said.

Ahmadian said in the meeting that the leaders of Iran and Russia seek closer energy ties and that the SNSC will work toward the full implementation of contracts between the two countries. Miller is the third senior Russian government official to visit Tehran after Ahmadian's visit to Russia in early September to attend a meeting of top security officials of the BRICS grouping of developing countries.

Putin's aide Igor Levitin and Russia's Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu were in Tehran last week to meet with Ahmadian and other senior Iranian government officials.

Iran, China stress implementation of cooperation plan

Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati and his Chinese counterpart Lan Fo'an emphasized the importance of implementing a comprehensive cooperation plan between the two countries.

Hemmati held a meeting with Fo'an on Wednesday to discuss banking cooperation and other important issues related to bilateral relations, especially the follow-up of the results of previous agreements, IRNA reported.

They also focused on the upcoming joint economic commission meeting of the two countries.

Both ministers emphasized the need for a more serious and in-depth implementation of the long-term comprehensive strategic plan between Iran and China, and they are committed to continuing this path until practical achievements are gained in the official interactions between the two countries.

The "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement" between Tehran and Beijing heralds opportunities for Iran's economic diplomacy, but the road to its implementation is riddled with challenges.

The economic opportunities include the potential

to facilitate communication and information infrastructure, expand trade and investment as well as financial and banking cooperation, and allow Iran to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative and reduce sanctions pressure. However, the disparity of expectations from the agreement, the inconsistency of the two countries' theoretical and practical policy-making, their distinct commercial structures, sanction-related snags in financial and banking convergence, and the dearth of economic and commercial diplomats in Iran mean the two countries have an uphill task to implement the agreement.

The most important of these challenges is the heavy shadow of sanctions, which severely limits Iran's room for maneuver, but also a reason for the two countries to cooperate.

The changing structural conditions and the flux of the international system marked by the decline of the US hegemony exert pressures on emerging powers such as China and regional powers such as Iran.

Under structural pressures, Iran and China are

faced with certain requirements and contingencies that lead them to convergence. This is the basis for the initiation of the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement which is based on mutual requirements and necessities.

One of the most important manifestations of the hegemonic power's confrontationalism is the use of sanctions, which have been widely used in the United States' foreign policy in recent years in such a way that the number of countries targeted by sanctions has increased. Although the degree of being impacted by sanctions is a function of the size and strength of economies and hence, it is different from country to country, the imperative to face off the hegemon is common. Under the pressure of several decades of sanctions, which have intensified in recent years due to the nuclear standoff, Iran has pursued a "look east" policy.

Iran's expectations of economic opening after submitting to a nuclear agreement in 2015 were met with former president Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the accord and his imposition



of new sanctions under Washington's "maximum pressure" campaign.

Amid the exponential pressure of sanctions, Iran took on the path of Asia to break the tightening web of sanctions and turned its attention to China more than before.

A glance at Iran's trade relations shows China is Iran's first economic partner, with a distant 30% share of the country's foreign trade compared to other countries.

China is the most important source for Iran's technological and industrial needs, the most important buyer of Iranian oil and the only country that has chosen the policy of keep-

ing its economy open to Iran at a time of mounting sanctions pressure.

Moreover, under the guiding principle of "China's peaceful rise," the Chinese government pursues a policy of economic activism in various regions, especially strategic regions such as the Persian Gulf. Given the enormity of energy intensive industries in China, the imperative to guarantee energy security is one of the key pillars of the country's economic development strategy.

This per se explains Beijing's endeavors to strengthen economic relations with the oil-rich countries of the region such as Iran and Saudi



Iranian Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati (l) shakes hands with his Chinese counterpart Lan Fo'an in Samarqand, Uzbekistan on September 25, 2024.
● IRNA

Arabia.

However, it should be noted that the role of Iran is more important and the Chinese are well aware of Iran's capacity and ability to influence the stability and security of the region. Hence, they are keen to strengthen Iran's stabilizing role in the region in order to guarantee energy security, and the 25-year strategic partnership agreement fulfills this part of China's intentions.



Iran stands as world's 5th tile, ceramic producer

Iran ranks fifth in the world with the annual production of 500 million square meters of all kinds of tile and ceramic products, as announced by the head of the Iran Ceramic Producers Syndicate on Wednesday. Speaking at a presser on the 29th International Tile, Ceramic & Sanitary Ware Exhibition in Tehran, Behnam Azizzadeh added that Iranian-made tile and ceramic products are comparable with similar foreign prod-

ucts, IRNA reported. He added the tile and ceramic production is a leading industry in the field of mining industry, which has created employment for 450,000 people along with creating a significant investment capacity for the country.

Stating that more than 145 production units in the field of tiles and ceramics are active across the country, Azizzadeh said the output capacity of the units

stands at about 750 million square meters.

He put the current annual production at 500 million square meters, of which 200 million square meters were exported last year.

Iran exports its tile and ceramic products to 50 countries as Iraq with imports of 140 million square meters was the first destination for Iranian products during the year to March 19. "In terms of produc-

tion, the industry has met domestic needs and has fetched a considerable figure of forex through exports."

If export conditions are not facilitated, there is a possibility of losing global markets, he warned.

Azizzadeh laid emphasis on finding new export markets and said, "Although Russia has a high demand for tile and ceramic products, we do not have a share of exports to the country."

West Asia's first geothermal plant to be launched in Iran by yearend

The first geothermal power plant in West Asia, with a production capacity of five megawatts, will come on stream in Meshginshahr, in the northwestern province of Ardebil, by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2025).

Deputy Head of Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) Mehran Golabkesh stated that the project is under construction as a pilot project on a reservoir of geothermal energy with a total production capacity of about 250 megawatts

of electricity, Tasnim News Agency reported. The project has progressed by 93 percent, he said, adding that several wells as deep as about 3,000 meters have been drilled to explore and extract the geothermal resources.

Iran's first geothermal power plant is being constructed in an area 25 kilometers south of Meshginshahr by Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH). Geothermal power is electrical power generated from geothermal en-



ergy. Technologies in use include dry steam power stations, flash steam power stations and binary cycle power stations. Geothermal electricity generation is currently used in 26 countries, while geothermal heating is in use in 70 countries.



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