

Iran Hopes For Russian Help In Nuclear Settlement.

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MOSCOW, February 16 (RIA Novosti) - Iran is hoping for Russia's help in resolving the crisis around the Islamic Republic's nuclear programs, the country's ambassador in Moscow said Thursday.

"Given the friendly relations between Russia and Iran, I hope we will settle the crisis that has emerged recently together," Gholamreza Ansari told a roundtable in the Russian lower house of parliament.

Ansari said that his country appreciated Russia's position on what the international community has called Iran's nuclear file.

"The Russian government recognizes Iran's right to have peaceful nuclear technology, which is the most important to us. That is why Iran is ready to maintain cooperation in all spheres with Russia, and all sections of Iranian society are unanimous that we must intensify cooperation with Russia," the diplomat said.

Konstantin Kosachev, head of the Russian State Duma's international affairs committee, underscored that the dispute must be resolved peacefully, but U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said using military force was still a possibility.

The European Parliament, which proposed Wednesday the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East to include Israel, affirmed the possibility of resolving the conflict militarily.

Kosachev affirmed Russia's involvement in the affair, noting that Russia and Iran have been linked by centuries-old ties.

"The Soviet Union and Iran shared a land border. Today, we share a border in [the Caspian] sea and a wide range of interests on a global and regional scale," the lawmaker said, referring to the South Caucasus republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republic of Turkmenistan, which border on the Islamic Republic and were part of the Soviet Union.

Russia and Iran have pursued a range of major joint projects in the transportation and energy industries and in the development of mineral resources. Russia is helping the Islamic Republic build a nuclear power plant in Bushehr, a project estimated at \$800 million.

"Our cooperation does not violate the requirements set by [the UN nuclear watchdog] the IAEA, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," Kosachev said. "Western countries, including the United States, have dropped Bushehr-related accusations against Russia,"

Earlier, some European Union countries and the U.S., which fear Iran is seeking to build nuclear weapons, suspected Russia of sharing nuclear technology with Iran.

Kosachev expressed hope that Tehran would not reject Russia's proposal to enrich uranium for its nuclear power plants on Russian territory and said talks on the matter would be held February 20.

Talks on the Russian initiative, which the global community hopes will help resolve the conflict over Iran's nuclear enrichment program, were to take place in Moscow February 16, but were postponed by Tehran. Iran

has repeatedly insisted the Russian proposal be amended to heed what it called its legitimate right to pursue peaceful nuclear programs.
