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## Conditions favorable for boosting Iran-Gazprom cooperation

PIN - 21/10/2007

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Oil minister's deputy for international affairs here Saturday termed current conditions as satisfactory for expansion of cooperation between Iran and Gazprom as well as other oil and gas companies of Russia and Caspian Sea littoral states.

Hossein Noqrekar-Shirazi pointed to the recent meetings of Russian company Gazprom officials with Iranian oil officials and added, 'Given appropriate atmosphere created by the summit of Caspian Sea littoral states in Tehran and the first visit of Gazprom officials' to Iran, the sides have explored avenues for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.'

According to the official, the parties reviewed the already defined cooperation and enlisted their future cooperation.

'Cooperation revolves around oil and gas projects and development of refineries, pipelines, and phases of South Pars field,' said the deputy oil minister.

National Iranian Oil Co. (NIOC) and Gazprom would form working groups in the near future, said Noqrekar-Shirazi, adding the working groups had already helped the two sides reach agreement in the gas sector in general and liquefied natural gas (LNG) proposed by Gazprom in particular.

Last Wednesday, Gazprom officials and Iran's Acting Oil Minister Gholamhossein Nozari discussed reinforcement of cooperation.

Gazprom said it was still positive about joint project between Russia, Iran, and Armenia to construct an oil refinery in Armenia.

Gazprom Neft - the oil arm of Russian energy company Gazprom =80' is reportedly considering an investment of \$1.7 billion to build the joint oil refinery, which will process oil pumped from Tabriz in northern Iran, 'The Messenger' reported.

Gazprom officials said it would process 5-6 million tons of oil annually. Some would be used by Armenia; most would be shipped back to Iran.

Valery Golubev, head of Gazprom's Investment and Construction Department, commented that the project was still in the offing but an appropriate 400-hectare site for the refinery had not yet been found.

Some Russian commentators suggest the project was motivated by political rather than financial interests, as usually the most economically productive location for an oil refinery was near a major pipeline route or at a seaport.

However, Gazprom replied that with effective management, the refinery could be economically profitable and may offer competition for Azerbaijan, the main oil exporter in the South Caucasus.

However, Regnum quoted Gobulev as saying, 'Building an oil refinery in Armenia is interesting for Gazprom from the geopolitical point of view.'

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