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## India for Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline despite US pressure.

RIA Novosti

3/4/2007

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NEW DELHI, April 3 (RIA Novosti) - The Indian government plans to go ahead with the Iran-Pakistan-Indian gas pipeline project, despite pressure from Washington which opposes the deal, CNSNews quoted Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee as saying Tuesday.

"Talks on the pipeline are ongoing," the minister said, adding that tariffs and customs duties were now being coordinated.

The leading Indian Express daily reported that New Delhi had told Iran that it would sign a gas sales and purchase agreement before June 2007.

India wants to build a \$7 billion pipeline from Iran through neighboring Pakistan that would deliver 5 million tons of liquefied natural gas annually over a 25-year period from 2009.

India's statement came as a rebuff to the U.S., following Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman's recent assertion in New Delhi that the groundbreaking Indo-U.S.

civilian nuclear cooperation deal may be jeopardized if the project went ahead, CNSNews said.

Bodman said that he had "made it clear at the highest levels of the Indian government" that the U.S. opposed the pipeline.

Last December, the U.S. Congress passed the U.S.-India civilian nuclear cooperation bill to assist India's civilian nuclear energy sector.

Now, the U.S. administration fears that revenues from the trilateral deal could help finance Iran's nuclear program.

A World Bank report published Monday said Iranian gas supplies would cost India less than any alternative project, and supplies via Bangladesh were likely to improve the economic and political situation in the entire region.

The World Bank's vice president for South Asia, Praful Patel, said that the coming summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation should consider strengthening regional economic cooperation, which could help solve financial and security issues in the region.

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