

Iran Says Bushehr Nuke Plant to Start Up 'Soon'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Iran's foreign minister said Wednesday that his country's Russian-built nuclear power plant at Bushehr would be switched on soon after years of delays, but gave no date.

Ali Akbar Salehi spoke at the start of talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, which were expected to focus on the latest Russian proposal to resolve global tension over Tehran's nuclear program.

"The launch of the Bushehr atomic power plant will take place soon," Salehi said through an interpreter.

Russia agreed to construct the plant, Iran's first, in the southwest of the country in the 1990s. Repeated delays have irritated Iran and fueled speculation that Moscow is using the project as a lever in diplomacy over Iran's nuclear program.

A senior Russian diplomat said this year that the plant was likely to become fully operational by early August. Lavrov said Wednesday that the "last preparatory steps" are being discussed and the plant could go on line soon.

The Bushehr nuclear power plant is not a weapons-proliferation concern because of international safeguards on its spent fuel. But Iran has celebrated the plant as a major technological achievement and a sign of its determination to master all aspects of nuclear technology.

Russia, which is pressing its proposal to revive negotiations with Iran, is a partner of the West and China in a six-nation group seeking to ensure that Tehran does not acquire nuclear weapons.

Moscow is calling for a phased process in which Iran would take concrete steps to ease concerns about its nuclear program and win concessions, such as the gradual easing of sanctions, in return.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad welcomed the proposal after talks with Russia's Security Council secretary Nikolai Patrushev in Tehran on Tuesday. But Iranian officials gave no indication that they were prepared to address what Western powers see as the crucial concern — Iran's uranium enrichment activities.

"We have the impression that there is an understanding of the need to strengthen trust and seek a way to resolve the questions of Iran's nuclear program," Lavrov told Salehi.

Salehi praised the Russian proposal in vague terms at the start of the meeting with Lavrov.

"I agree that talks should be begun on the Iranian nuclear question," Salehi said, adding, "[but] we will not accept any kind of pressure."

"We consider that there are good elements in [the Russian] proposal. It puts obligations on all sides," Salehi said.

Lavrov said Iran had shown a "lively interest" in the proposal, details of which have not yet been made public.

"We hope this will help us move forward faster than has been the case until now and that we can resume negotiations soon," Lavrov told a joint news conference with Salehi.

(Reuters, Bloomberg)

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