

Iran, Citing Delays, Snubs Gazprom in Major Oil Field

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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TEHRAN, Iran — Iran has "excluded" Gazprom from a major oil field project, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported Monday, in the latest snub to foreign investors that Tehran feels are not fulfilling their promises.

But other reports suggest that Iran is still seeking major investments from abroad, as well as seeking cash through a sell-off of its refineries.

"After several ultimatums and delays by Russia's Gazprom, this big global gas producing company has been excluded from the development plan of the Azar joint oil field," the National Iranian Oil Company said in a statement carried by Mehr.

The Russian energy giant had not actually signed a contract to develop the on-shore field on the border with Iraq, where it is known as Badrah, but Iranian media reported in March 2010 that it was about to do so. Mehr said talks had broken down by March this year.

"Gazprom was put out of the negotiations about the development of the Azar oil field six months ago, and any request by Gazprom to get back into the oil field's development would require [new] examination and evaluation," Hamid Karimi, an oil official overseeing the development of the field, was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency.

The comments by Iranian officials about the breakdown of talks with Gazprom come a few weeks after Iran's new oil minister, Rostam Qasemi, took office, saying Iran had no need for foreign investment in its vital oil and gas industries.

With the withdrawal of Western oil companies due to tighter U.S. and European Union sanctions, analysts had forecast a bigger role for other players, but there have been few signs of increased investment and Qasemi has said they are not needed.

Tehran has told the China National Petroleum Corporation it will be replaced by domestic companies if it does not step up work on phase 11 of the giant South Pars gas field.

But the English-language Tehran Times reported Monday that Iran and China would invest \$12 billion over the next 10 years to develop the Azadegan oil field, also on the Iraqi border.

In another sign that Iran is seeking funding from outside government coffers, an official has announced plans to sell off oil refineries, with Iranian and international investors being invited to buy shares.

"Seven of the country's nine oil refineries will be ceded to the private sector by the end of the current Iranian year [March 19, 2012]," Ali Reza Zeighami, managing director of the National Iranian Refining and Oil Products Distribution Company, told an oil ministry web site.

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