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Bushehr Nuclear Plant Sees More Delays

By The Moscow Times

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Iran’s controversial first nuclear power plant is yet to come on line, and Tehran is blaming Russia for the delays. **Sajad Safari**

TEHRAN, Iran — An Iranian lawmaker said the country's first nuclear power plant will not be on line by late August as planned and blamed the delay on Russia, which is building the facility, local media reported Monday.

The disclosure by Asgar Jalalian, a member of a special parliamentary committee for the Bushehr nuclear plant, reflects the continued difficulties Iran has faced in moving forward with its controversial nuclear program.

The 1,000-megawatt plant, being built in the southern port city of Bushehr, has experienced repeated delays and pressure by the United States and its allies, which are convinced that the program is aimed at developing nuclear weapons. Iran says its program is for peaceful uses such as power generation.

The plant is being built by Russia's Rosatom and was to be finished by 1999, four years after

the state corporation began construction of the $1 billion facility.

Jalalian, in comments carried by the reformist daily Aftab, blamed his country's Russian partner for the latest delays. He said the committee on which he serves has determined that the late August startup deadline will be missed and said they had handed over a report dealing with the issue to the parliament.

"We believe the Russians are not being honest ... about the plant," Jalalian said. He urged Iranian officials to clarify the terms of the deal through "transparent and firm talks, without any 'buts' or 'ifs.'"

Jalalian said Iran had already paid at least twice more than the planned construction costs on the project, and additional funds are being demanded.

The contracts with the Russians have no "clear financial ceiling, timetable and end date," he said, also claiming that the Russian partner had reneged on a promise to transfer technology to Iran, as promised in the deal.

Rosatom spokesman Sergei Novikov said the company had no comment.

It was unclear when the full parliament would review the committee's report on the delay or what steps they might take. But the report is the first issued at such a high level to be circulated among Iranian officials.

The Bushehr project dates back to 1974, when Iran's U.S.-backed Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi contracted with the German company Siemens to build the reactor. The company withdrew from the project after the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought hard-line clerics to power.

In 1992, Iran signed a $1 billion deal with Russia to complete the project, and work began in 1995. Since then, the project has been beset by problems linked to construction and supply glitches.

Iranian officials have acknowledged that a malicious computer worm infected laptops belonging to Bushehr employees last year, but denied that the Stuxnet worm had affected the facility. Tehran later blamed the United States and Israel for being behind the malicious software, saying it was part of a covert plan by Iran's enemies to sabotage its nuclear program.

Western nations have imposed sanctions on Iran over its uranium enrichment program.

Russia delivered 82 metric tons of fuel for the reactor in eight shipments in 2007-08. That amount is enough for one year of operations in Bushehr's light-water reactor. But in February, Russia ordered the removal of that fuel due to concerns that metal particles might be contaminating fuel assemblies. Reloading began in April.

The delays at Bushehr have hurt relations with Moscow and prompted Iranian officials to describe Russia as an "unreliable partner."

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