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Turkmenistan Plans to Close Giant Burning Gas Pit

By AFP

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The giant crater has been aflame for five decades.. **Wikimedia Commons**

Turkmenistan's strongman leader has ordered experts to find a way to finally extinguish a massive five-decade old fire in a giant natural gas crater in the Central Asian country, dubbed the "Gateway to Hell."

Citing environmental and economic concerns, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov appeared on state television Saturday telling officials to put out the flames at the Darvaza gas crater in the middle of the vast Karakum desert.

In 2010, Berdymukhamedov also ordered experts to find a way to put out the flames that have been burning ever since a Soviet drilling operation went awry in 1971.

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov said that the man-made crater "negatively affects both the environment and the health of the people living nearby."

"We are losing valuable natural resources for which we could get significant profits and use them for improving the well-being of our people," he said in televised remarks.

Berdymukhamedov instructed officials to "find a solution to extinguish the fire."

The crater was created in 1971 during a Soviet drilling accident that hit a gas cavern, causing the drilling rig to fall in and the earth to collapse underneath it.

To prevent the dangerous fumes from spreading, the Soviets decided to burn off the gas by setting it on fire.

The pit has been ablaze ever since and previous attempts to put it out have been unsuccessful.

The resulting crater — 70 metres (229 feet) wide and 20 metres (65 feet) deep — is a popular tourist attraction in the ex-Soviet country.

In 2018, the president officially renamed it to the "Shining of Karakum."

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