

## Moscow races to finish Iran's Bushehr reactor by mid-2009

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DEBKAFfile's Iranian and Moscow sources report that Atomstroieexport, the Russian firm under contract to build and activate Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr, is offering nuclear engineers and technicians top salaries to leave for Iran at short notice. The Kremlin has promised Tehran to have the reactor up and running by mid-2009. Some 1,600 experts are already at work on the site; the project is short of another 500 to meet this deadline.

An Atomstroieexport spokesman explained this week that the main technology for the station has already been installed "so the construction work is getting under way." Our Iranian sources report that this is the first time Russian officials have admitted that the Bushehr reactor is close to completion.

Sergei Kiriyenko, director of the Russian company, visited Tehran on Nov. 27 to tie up the final stage of the reactor's construction. Kiriyenko, former Russian prime minister and personal emissary of the incumbent prime minister Vladimir Putin, again assured the Iranians that the reactor would be ready to go within a few months.

Our sources add that the Bushehr plant will make it possible for Iran to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Its completion will provide Iran with an alternative weapons fuel option in addition to the enriched uranium already accumulated for its first nuclear bomb. US and Israel intelligence had believed the plutonium track lagged behind the uranium process. However, now that Moscow has embarked on a crash program to finish the Bushehr project, this no longer holds true.

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