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Reuters

Turkmens insist on trans-Afghan gas line

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Turkmenistan, holder of the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves, has said it would hold roadshows in September-October for investors willing to take part in the TAPI project aimed to ship Turkmen gas to India via a trans-Afghan pipeline.

Turkmenistan agreed in May to supply natural gas to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan by signing gas sales and purchase agreements with Pakistan's Inter State Gas Systems and Indian state-run utility GAIL.

The U.S.-backed, 1,735-kilometer TAPI, named after the initial letters of the participant nations, is a major boon for Turkmenistan which is seeking to diversify its energy exports from its traditional market, Russia.

The project also promises major benefits to energy-hungry regional rivals India and Pakistan. "The TAPI project will ensure long-term (annual) shipments of over 30 billion cubic metres (bcm) of Turkmen natural gas to the countries of Southeast Asia," state television showed Turkmen President Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov as telling a government meeting late on July 27.

Souring official optimism, many analysts point to TAPI's 735-kilometer leg that would run through the Afghan provinces of Herat and Kandahar, adding that the project would face significant security problems after a planned pullout of U.S.-led NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014.

Berdymukhamedov, whose Central Asian nation of 5.5 million people is listed by human rights bodies among the most reclusive and repressive in the world, made no mention of the security challenges facing the long-touted TAPI.

Asian bank supports

“This will help the economic growth of the TAPI participant states and, more importantly, will contribute to regional peace, stability and security,” said Berdymukhamedov, who enjoys vast powers and a rising personality cult in his ex-Soviet country.

The Asian Development Bank had said the TAPI pipeline was estimated to cost at least \$7.6 billion back in 2008. Analysts and officials now say it could cost between \$10 billion and \$12 billion to construct.

According to estimates by industry experts and government officials, Turkmen gas supplies to Pakistan could begin in 2016 and to India in 2018.

Turkmenistan does not disclose data for its current gas exports. BP estimates show that last year the country produced 59.5 bcm of natural gas and consumed internally 25 billion cubic meters.

BP data show Turkmenistan’s natural gas reserves are behind only Russia, Iran and Qatar.