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AFP

Chavez vows to back Iran 'under any circumstances,' hopes to bolster trade ties

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Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez vowed Tuesday to back ally Tehran “under any circumstances” as his Iranian counterpart and host praised Caracas for fighting sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

“Venezuela will remain alongside Iran under any circumstances,” Chavez, who is on his ninth visit to the Islamic Republic, told Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during a meeting, according to the presidency website.

“Venezuela seriously considers cooperation with Iran as a holy matter,” he said, adding “independent nations” can join forces to “strengthen our power in facing imperialists.”

Chavez has been trying to bolster his international standing as he continues to spar openly with the US, an arch-foe of Iran.

The firebrand South American leader’s visit to Iran is part of an international tour aimed at strengthening his country’s economic ties with Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Relations between Iran and Venezuela, two major oil-producing nations, have flourished under Ahmadinejad’s presidency, especially after Chavez openly backed Tehran’s nuclear drive.

Ahmadinejad himself visited Venezuela in November last year in what was seen as an act of defiance against US-led efforts to step up sanctions against Iran for refusing to abandon its sensitive uranium enrichment program.

On Tuesday, the Iranian hardliner praised Venezuela for supporting his country.

“The progressive and brotherly stance taken by Venezuela in condemning the sanctions imposed by bullying powers against the Iranian nation displays deep and strong bilateral relations,” Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying on the presidency website.