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Turkmenistan, Afghan, Pak, India to sign gas pipeline deal

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Islamabad - Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are scheduled to sign a landmark agreement for a multi-billion gas pipeline project in Ashgabat on September 20, Pakistan's Petroleum Ministry said today.

The pact will be signed by the Petroleum Ministers of the four countries at Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.

Petroleum and Natural Resources Minister Syed Naveed Qamar will represent Pakistan at the signing ceremony of the Gas Pipeline Framework Agreement (GPFA) for the TAPI gas pipeline, a statement issued by the ministry said.

The TAPI project is meant to bring natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan.

The heads of state of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed an inter-governmental agreement (IGA) for joint oil and gas pipeline projects between the three countries in 2002.

India joined the project in 2008 and a revised GPFA was initialled for the induction of India, thus changing the name of the project from TAP to TAPI.

An ADB sponsored pre-feasibility study, conducted in 2004, indicated that the 1680-km pipeline project was economically and financially viable.

It estimated the cost at USD 3.3 billion though the figure was revised to USD 7.6 billion in 2008. The pipeline would be designed to carry 3.2 BCFD gas from Turkmenistan, delivering 0.5 BCFD to Afghanistan and 1.35 BCFD each to Pakistan and India.

The proposed signing of the GPFA would be a landmark achievement as the project has seen no progress since 2008, Pakistan's Petroleum Ministry said.

President Asif Ali Zardari had reactivated the project during a recent telephone discussion with his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov.

"Zardari has directed Syed Naveed Qamar, Federal Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources, to expedite concluding various agreements with the target of finalising Gas Sales Purchase Agreement by the end of this year or early next year," the statement said.

After the signing of the GPFA in Ashgabad next week, the countries plan to convene rigorous rounds of negotiations to finalise the Gas Sales Purchase Agreement during a proposed TAPI summit in Ashgabad.

"The renewed attention to this project from the present government would lead to significantly improving energy availability for Pakistan and help resolve the energy crisis," the Petroleum Ministry said.