

Russia Expanding Cooperation with Venezuela and Bolivia

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Caracas, Apr 2 (Prensa Latina) Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin arrived Friday in Caracas to preside over the signing of a set of cooperation agreements with his Venezuelan and Bolivian peers Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, which will strengthen Moscow's strategic relations with these two Latin American countries.

Russian and Venezuelan officials plan to sign new agreements for energy projects in Venezuela, as well as industrial, commercial and agriculture projects. There is, too, an agreement to set up a Russian-Venezuelan development bank to finance oil and gas exploration in Venezuela's Orinoco river basin.

Chavez also reiterated that Russia will help Venezuela develop nuclear energy plan he has mentioned previously that has yet to take shape. Russia has also offered to help Venezuela set up its own space industry, including a satellite launch site.

Moscow and Caracas are studying, too, the establishment of a joint oil company that will begin producing 50,000 oil crude barrels daily this year and has growth prospects.

President Chavez, who welcomed Putin at the airport, underlined the importance of extending collaboration to sectors as agriculture, education, fishing, infrastructure, transport and health.

The relations between both countries have outstandingly increased since Chavez' first trip to Russia in 2001.

Putin and Evo Morales, meanwhile, are expected to discuss their own joint venture for gas and oil exploration in Bolivia, which has the second largest natural gas reserves in Latin America.

In Moscow last February, Morales and President Dmitri Medvedev signed a memorandum on energy cooperation to develop a gas pipeline network in the land-locked South American nation.

Medvedev at the time also told Morales he hoped Russia would soon deliver a batch of military helicopters, its first defense hardware for the Andean republic.

With Putin, Morales plans to discuss a credit of 100 million dollars for the Bolivian army.

Besides, Morales will assess with Chavez to close a trade deal, said his spokesman Ivan Canelas. The two countries have already signed eight agreements on energy, agriculture-

livestock, rural development, higher education, social development, education, sports, health and security cooperation.

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