

Venezuela celebrates arrival of Iranian petrol tanker

The first of five Iranian tankers has docked in the South American country.



A worker of the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA waves an Iranian flag as the Iranian-flagged oil tanker Fortune docks at the El Palito refinery in Puerto Cabello, in the northern state of Carabobo, Venezuela. AFP



Workers on the 'Fortune' the Iranian ship with gasoline in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. EPA



Iranian-flagged oil tanker Fortune docked at the El Palito refinery after its arrival to Puerto Cabello, in the northern state of Carabobo, Venezuela. AFP



The Venezuelan industry minister Tareck El Aissami (C), speaks next to Venezuela's Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino(R) after the Iranian oil tanker Fortune docked at the El Palito refinery in Puerto Cabello, in the northern state of Carabobo, Venezuela. AFP

Venezuelan authorities celebrated on Monday as the first of five Iranian tankers loaded with petrol docked in the South American country, delivering badly needed fuel to the crisis-stricken country that has the world's largest oil reserves.

The petrol shipments are arriving in defiance of stiff sanctions by the Trump administration against both countries, and they mark a new era in the burgeoning relationship between Venezuela and Iran, which is expanding its footprint in the

Western Hemisphere.

"We keep moving forward and winning," Venezuela's Minister of Energy Tareck El Aissami said on Twitter.

State TV played images of the ship pulling through Caribbean waters as Venezuelan fighter jets flew overhead. Mr. El Aissami posted photographs on his Twitter account of the sun rising over the tanker docked at El Palito refinery.

Washington says Iran and Venezuela are run by repressive regimes. It recently announced a \$15 million reward for President Nicolas Maduro's arrest on drug smuggling charges in a "maximum pressure" campaign against the socialist leader.

The US recognizes opposition politician Juan Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate leader in a coalition of nearly 60 nations, which consider Mr. Maduro's election a fraud because his most popular rivals were banned from running.

In a sign of rising tension inside Venezuela, the chief prosecutor on Monday asked the pro-Maduro Supreme Court to decide whether Mr. Guaido's political party Popular Will should be designated a terrorist organization.

"Confronted with the impossibility of obtaining power through votes, Popular Will has turned to violence," Attorney General Tarek William Saab said, accusing the party of hiring "mercenaries" who carried out a recently failed incursion, among other alleged acts. Mr. Maduro's advisers had dealt with the man leading the attempt, though Mr. Guaido himself denied any involvement.

The first Iranian ship to arrive, the *Fortune*, is trailed by four other tankers expected to arrive in the next few days. The shipments, however, only carry enough fuel for two or three weeks, analysts say.

Russ Dallen, head of the Miami investment firm Caracas Capital Markets, said the Iranian shipments were anything but a victory for Venezuelans. The first tanker carries an estimated 11 million gallons of petrol to a nation with roughly 5 million cars, he said.

"Venezuela, the country with the largest oil reserves in the world, is now reduced to importing millions of gallons of gasoline from another failed pariah state halfway around the world," Mr. Dallen said.

Venezuela also has one of the world's largest refineries, which has fallen to disrepair. The country produces a fraction of oil it did when Mr. Maduro's predecessor, the late Hugo Chavez, rose to power two decades ago and launched Venezuela's socialist revolution.

Critics blame corruption and mismanagement amid an economic crisis that has led to huge migration by Venezuelans seeking to escape poverty, shortages of basic goods, and crime.

Deep petrol shortages have plagued Venezuela for years, though the problem had until recently largely spared the capital of Caracas.

Despite Washington's objections, the first ship arrived with no interference from US ships patrolling the Caribbean on what officials call a drug interdiction mission.

Mr. Maduro on Sunday expressed gratitude to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ai Khamenei and the Iranian people from "the bottom of my heart". He said Iran and Venezuela have a right just like any other nations in the world to engage in trade.

We are "two rebel nations, two revolutionary nations that will never kneel down before US imperialism," Mr. Maduro said. "Venezuela has friends in this world and brave friends at that".

Source:

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/the-americas/venezuela-celebrates-arrival-of-iranian-petrol-tanker-1.1024804>

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