

Leaders strengthen alliance against U.S.

The Miami Herald
Sep. 18, 2006

CUIDAD BOLIVAR, Venezuela - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chavez, his Venezuelan counterpart, visited a joint petroleum project Monday as they strengthened their alliance against U.S. influence.

The presidents shook hands with oil workers and questioned them on crude exploration at the inauguration of drilling rigs in Venezuela's Orinoco River basin.

"We are joining you so this massive petroleum reserve, the biggest any country has in the world, serves us for the development of our peoples," Chavez said following the ceremony in San Tome, about 225 miles southeast of Caracas.

Chavez and Ahmadinejad, both preparing to travel to New York for this week's U.N. General Assembly, accused Washington of trying to stifle the development of their nations while seeking to dominate international affairs.

"They want to govern the world," said Ahmadinejad, who is backing Venezuela's bid for a U.N. Security Council seat that would give Chavez a platform to battle U.S. efforts at sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

Iran insists its nuclear research is aimed solely at peaceful uses despite concerns among U.S. and European governments that it could be trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The state-run oil companies of Venezuela and Iran - Petroleos de Venezuela SA and Petropars - are jointly exploring an area of the Orinoco containing estimated reserves of 1.5 billion barrels of oil.

"The message from what occurred today is that revolutionary and independent peoples, with mutual help, are capable of providing for themselves," Ahmadinejad said through an interpreter. "Venezuela and Iran have shown that, together, beyond the reach of U.S. hegemony and imperialism, they can work and progress."

Monday's tour came a day after Venezuelan and Iranian officials signed a series of accords, including agreements for Tehran to help Venezuela develop oil fields. The governments plan to build factories to produce everything from bricks to bicycles, and have agreed to set up a \$2 billion investment fund.