

Iran Petrochemical Exports Top \$3.6bn



A view of the Mahshahr petrochemical plant in the southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan.

TEHRAN (Press TV) - Iran has exported over 3.6 billion dollars worth of an array of petrochemicals during the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year, which started on March 20.

The country sold more than 8.724 million tons of a variety of petrochemicals at international markets in the aforementioned period.

The figure points to a growing trend in the exports following the implementation of last year's nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

(JCPOA), and easing of sanctions as well as banking restrictions, IRNA reported.

The National Petrochemical Company (NPC) said on Saturday that Iran's petrochemical industry produce over 21.238 million tons of petrochemicals in the same period. Iran exported 1.859 million tons of petrochemicals valued at over 569 million dollars to global markets only in the Persian calendar month of Mordad (July 22-August 21).

The country currently has the capacity to produce 61 million tons of petrochemicals but the

figure can reach 120 million tons by 2025 providing the completion of the construction of half-finished projects.

On January 16, Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia - plus Germany started implementing the JCPOA, which they had clinched on July 14, 2015.

Under the nuclear agreement, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program in return for the termination of all nuclear-related sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Algeria Backs Iran Vs. Saudi Arabia on Oil

TEHRAN (Press TV) - The Algerian energy minister has lent weight to Iran's bid to regain market share through stepped-up oil production despite objections from Saudi Arabia.

Algeria is about to host a meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers later this month, with the issue of capping production expected to be the focus of the discussions.

"Iran has the right to increase production to the pre-sanctions level," Algeria's Noureddine Bouterfa said in Moscow on Friday, referring to 2012 Western sanctions which cut Iranian oil exports by more than half.

Bouterfa visited Tehran last Saturday as part of his whirlwind tour of several countries to build consensus among major producers "to strike a balance in the oil market in order to prop up prices in a reasonable way."

The Algerian minister has sounded upbeat about the results of the OPEC meeting in his country, saying all conditions were ready for reaching a consensus among members.

"OPEC members are trying to

reach a price of \$50 to \$60 per barrel and we have made a request for reaching consensus on a price and coordination among OPEC members in this regard," Bouterfa said.

The last effort to strike a freeze deal fell through after Saudi Arabia insisted that Iran should join the initiative.

In Moscow, Bouterfa said oil producers could accommodate an increase in oil production by Iran as well as Nigeria and Libya. "All the solutions are possible," he said. Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak reiterated his country's support for a freeze deal. "We hope that the divisions within OPEC will soon be overcome and a compromise solution would be found," he said after talks with Bouterfa.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said a potential freeze deal should involve some compromise on Iran's production levels.

"Iran is starting from a very low position, connected with the well-known sanctions in relation to this country," the Russian president said last week, adding, "It would be unfair to leave it on this sanctioned

level." It was not immediately clear whether Saudi authorities would give way to a consensus this time around even as Iran has reiterated its determination to continue ramped-up production.

Bouterfa was to meet Saudi Oil Minister Khalid al-Falih as well as OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo in Paris next to evaluate the situation.

The Algerian minister did not rule out the collapse of the talks in his country, saying should they fall apart, OPEC members would continue their dialog at their next official meeting in Vienna.

"If we have an agreement in Algiers it's very good but if we don't have an agreement, it's also good," he said.

Global oil prices have seen a fall from a high of 147 dollars a barrel to a low of around 25 dollars in recent years.

Putin has held Saudi Arabia responsible for failed attempts to reach a freeze pact in April, saying "it was our Saudi partners who at the last minute changed their point of view and decided to take a time out in taking this decision."

NICO, Total to Sign Oil Swap Contract

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Naftiran Intertrade Company Sàrl (NICO) and France's Total S.A. Company have agreed on sealing an oil swap deal.

Naftiran Intertrade Company Sàrl (NICO), a Swiss-based subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), and Total oil company of France have agreed on inking a deal to swap crude oil from Caspian Sea littoral states.

Following the earlier contract between Iran and France over exports of 160 to 200 thousand barrels of crude per day, an oil swap deal is also expected to be inked in near future.

In addition to Total, two other oil giants, Vitol of Switzerland and England's BP (British Petroleum), have also held successful oil swap negotiations with Iran's NIOC.

So far in the post-JCPOA era, Total has signed a contract to purchase 160 thousand barrels of Iranian crude per day, a confidentiality agreement for development of South Azadegan oilfield as well as a Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) to construct a petrochemical complex in southern

Iran.

Hassan Bagherian, Director of the Tehran Department of the Iranian Oil Pipelines and Telecommunications Company, has recently told a press conference that the refinery is prepared for swapping oil with northern neighbors of Iran by building the adjoining facilities.

"the facility can swap over half a million barrels of oil to these countries as well as two other Iranian refineries on a daily basis," underlined the official adding "Tehran Refinery is ready to receive oil feeds from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan as Iran is planning oil swap with the countries."

Hamidreza Shahdoust, a local Iranian Oil Terminals Company (IOTC) official in the city of northern city of Neka, had said earlier that Neka Oil Terminal enjoys a total storage capacity of 120 thousand barrels per day in its 12 tanks; "moreover, the project to increase oil swap capacity to 2.5 million barrels per day has kicked off," he had noted.

Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh, while pointing to Iran's readiness for oil swap with Russia, had earlier noted "the Russian side has also voiced willingness for swapping a portion of its oil production through Iran's route and relevant negotiations are underway."

"The capacity exists for a maximum swap of 150 thousand oil barrels per day," underlined Zanganeh stressing "the process would boost Iran's market share since the replacement is delivered to customers in the Persian Gulf."

A key player in Iran's energy sector, NICO is a general contractor for the oil and gas industry which also handles trading and swaps operations on behalf of NIOC.

Iran eyes swap arrangements with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, under which it ships crude from the Central Asian producers to its Caspian ports. In exchange Iran delivers the equivalent barrels of crude on behalf of the three Central Asian producers to their customers in the Persian Gulf.

Pro-Brexit Trade Minister: British Businesses 'Lazy And Fat'

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain as a trading nation has become "too lazy and too fat" and business leaders are more interested in playing golf on Friday afternoons than in seeking new export markets, International Trade Secretary Liam Fox was recorded saying.

Fox, who was a prominent campaigner for Britain to leave the European Union and says the country must forge new trading relationships with the rest of the world, was recorded making the comments during a drinks party with activists.

Trade was one of the main issues at stake in Britain's EU referendum on June 23, which delivered the Brexit vote.

"This country is not the free trading nation that it once was. We have become too lazy and too fat on our successes in previous generations," he told members of the right-wing group Conservative Way Forward.

"What is the point of us reshaping global trade, what is the point of us going out and looking for new markets for the United Kingdom, if we don't have the exporters to fill

those markets?"

Those campaigning to stay in the bloc argued an exit would be profoundly damaging to trade, while those in favor of Brexit said it would give Britain the opportunity to look beyond Europe and export to other, more dynamic parts of the world.

But Fox complained of "companies who could be contributing to our national prosperity but choose not to because it might be too difficult or too time-consuming or that they can't play golf on a Friday afternoon."

Egypt Receives First Tranche of \$3 Billion World Bank Loan

NEW YORK (Bloomberg) - Egypt received the first \$1 billion tranche of a three-year, \$3 billion loan from the World Bank to fund government plans to boost growth. The money will be used to "create jobs and improve citizens' living standards,"

Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation Sahar Nasr said in an e-mailed statement. The government is already working on finalizing the second tranche from the World Bank, as well as from the African Development Bank, the minister said. Egypt

is also working to secure a \$12 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, part of an overall \$21 billion target over three years to fund measures to restore investor confidence and revive an economy that has struggled

General Motors Recalls More Than 4m Cars Over Airbag Failure



General Motors is recalling more than 4m vehicles in the U.S. over a software fault preventing airbags

LONDON (Financial Times) - General Motors is recalling more than 4m vehicles in the U.S. over a software fault preventing airbags from deploying that has resulted in one fatality.

The U.S. carmaker said sensors connected to the front airbags in its vehicles failed to detect a crash in "rare circumstances" when a vehicle was moving in a certain way before the impact.

The fault has been linked to one death and three injuries so far, and is the latest problem to emerge from technology that controls vehicle airbags.

More than 30m cars were recalled worldwide because of a safety failure with Takata airbags after almost a dozen fatalities globally - the largest recall in automotive history - while General Motors has faced its own airbag-related recall in the past.

Failures in ignition switches in some General Motors cars led to

hundreds of deaths and injuries over a number of years when airbags were deactivated and drivers lost control of their vehicles.

GM said it will recall 4.3m cars, SUVs and trucks across the Cadillac, Chevrolet and Buick brands built from 2014 onwards.

GM, whose shares fell 3.8 per cent, said: "GM will notify customers, and dealers will update the software free of charge."

It added: "The cost of the recall is not expected to be material and will be included in GM's third-quarter earnings."

Michelle Krebs, an analyst at Autotrader.com, said: "Airbags are an ongoing issue, that is the number one recalled item at the moment and will continue to be. There is particular sensitivity around issues with airbags and so I suspect automakers are recalling them as quickly as possible.

"We are seeing millions of airbags recalled and no manufacturer is going to risk dragging their heels on an airbag recall."