

China Interested in Investment in Iran's Infrastructural Projects



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Monday that China has voiced willingness to invest in the lucrative projects of Iran's infrastructural sector.

"During meetings with the Chinese officials, we talked about the infrastructural railway projects which are a priority in transportation between cities and the Chinese declared their willingness for investment," Boroujerdi said after heading a three-day visit by an Iranian parliamentary delegation to China.

Boroujerdi said that Beijing is ready to implement important projects in Iran, including Tehran-Mashhad and Tehran-Tabriz railway for high-speed trains.

"The Chinese officials have repeatedly stressed their support for the (2015) nuclear deal (between Tehran and the world powers) and opposition to the U.S. approach towards it," he added.

His remarks came as reports said in January that the trade exchanges between Iran and China increased 20.5% in the first 11 months of 2017, showing a positive trend for both countries.

Chinese Envoy to Tehran Pang Sen made the remarks, addressing the first international conference on Iran and China relations.

Pang Sen said that cooperation between the two countries within the framework of the Chinese initiative

'One Belt, One Road' on transportation, oil, gas, petrochemical, metallurgy, construction and infrastructure is increasing.

The initiative, introduced by China President Xi Jinping in 2013, is aimed at developing relations and connectivity among countries through restoring the ancient Silk Road.

"Iran and China as two important countries located along the Silk Road are involved in mutual cooperation," Sen said.

He also said that trade exchanges between Iran and China in the first 11-month period of the year 2017 grew by 20.5 percent, reaching to \$33.66bn.

In 2016, trade between the two countries was \$35 billion, which has exceeded \$ 43 billion for 2017.

Currently, oil, gas and petrochemicals are at the top of Iran's export priorities to China.

Energy Minister: Iran to Connect to European Power Grid

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian on Monday said that his country is planning to get connected to Europe through the power lines of the neighboring countries.

"Iran exchanges energy with its neighboring countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iraq," Ardakanian said.

Saying that Iran is paving the way for the investment of Iranian and foreign private sectors in renewable energies, Ardakanian said that energy investors can even export their own generated power to other countries by the Iranian power grid.

On the joint water fields with neighboring countries, he said that Iran and its neighbors can use the fields as a way to expand cooperation, the official said.



Iran's 10-Month Petrochemical Output Crosses 44.2mn Tons

TEHRAN (Shana) - The petrochemical plants operating in Iran supplied 44.2 million tons of petrochemical products over the course of the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21.

According to the National Petrochemical Company (NPC), the 57-mt/y production capacity of the sector is expected to cross 62 mn tons in this year while the total output is projected to reach 60 million tons this year.

The performance of 21 petrochemical complexes operating in Mahshahr, southwestern province of Khuzestan, from the beginning of the year to the end of the month of Dey (December 22-January 20) was 16.2 million tons.

This is while the plants' rated capacity stands at 25.6 million tons per year and its estimated output of the year is 21 mn tons.

The 16 plants operating in Asaluyeh, southern Iran, shows that the actual produc-



tion of this region during the mentioned period was about 18.6 million tons.

The annual nominal capacity of the petrochemical complexes in Asaluyeh is 32.7 million metric tons and its projected production is estimated at 11.4 million tons.

It should be noted that the following complexes were the most prolific petrochemical facilities during the month of Dey: Rijal, Bisotun, Ghaed Basir, Lorestan, Mahabad, Shimi Baft, Mehr, Karbon Iran Shahzand, Kermanshah Polymer, Jam, Noori, Khorasan, Laleh, Urmia, Shiraz, Pardis, and Kharg.

The annual nominal capacity

of petrochemical complexes in other parts of the country is 13.7 million metric tons and its projected production is estimated at 11.4 million tons.

Political ties between the two countries have paved the way for boosting of economic ties over the past five years and average trade exchanges between the two nations are increasing every day," al-Jabouri said.

The Iraqi parliament speaker expressed the hope for further promotion of cooperation with Iran in the scientific and technological fields and Iran's involvement in his country's reconstruction.

"Iraq's friendly countries, including Iran, which played a crucial role in fighting terrorism are welcome and appreciable in the eyes of the Iraqi nation," he said, adding that given numerous commonalities between the two nations, bilateral ties are expected to further improve in all fields.

Exports of Iranian Dates Surge

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The volume of exports of dates from Iran over the current fiscal year (starting March 20) has significantly increased.

Mohammdali Tahmasbi, a deputy agriculture minister, has said that country exported 171,000 tons of dates over the current fiscal year, Iran's domestic media reported.

According to the official figure has surged by 22 percent.

Mohammdali Tahmasbi further added that the output of the dates in the country in the mentioned period stood at one million tons.

Iran's agricultural exports amounted to \$4.005 billion during the first nine months of the current fiscal year (March 20-Dec. 21), 3.4 percent less year-on-year.

Trump Struggles on \$1 Trillion Pledge to Fix

Crumbling U.S. Infrastructure

NEW YORK (Bloomberg) - Donald Trump ran for president on the promise of \$1 trillion fix for crumbling U.S. roads, bridges and airports, but the plan he's rolling out Monday commits the federal government to spending just a fraction of that amount.

Instead, the White House wants to revamp how such projects are funded and approved to fix what officials call a broken system -- raising questions about how Trump can secure a bipartisan deal and fulfill a central campaign pledge.

The Democrats he'll need to enact any legislation have already dismissed his approach as a bait-and-switch because it lacks significant federal spending, while many Republicans have never been keen on big infrastructure packages.

The plan also comes on the heels of a \$1.5 trillion tax cut signed into law at the end of last year, as well as a \$300 billion spending measure last week that will add to the federal budget deficit, making some fiscal conservatives in Congress squirm. And it will compete for lawmakers' attention with a battle royale over immigration and other issues.

The administration sees its plan as the opening bid in a negotiation on the best way to meet the president's four objectives: stimulating at least \$1.5 trillion in new investment, shortening the project permitting time to two years, investing in rural projects, and better training to get more qualified workers, a senior White House official said on a call with reporters. Trump is open to new sources of funding, the official said.

The plan the president is releasing Monday calls for allocating \$200 billion in federal funds over a decade, mostly as seed money to spur states, localities and the private sector to spend the balance of the promised investment, the official said.

The strategy is to give Congress a set of principles, much as the administration did for the tax overhaul in 2017, and allow the details -- including how to pay for it -- to be worked out with lawmakers. There are at least six committees in the House and five in the Senate that will consider elements of the plan, White House officials said.

The plan's main principle is that states and localities own and finance most U.S. infrastructure, so the best role for the federal government is to help create sustainable local revenue streams for projects and focus on federal permit streamlining.

The White House also released its fiscal 2019 budget on Monday, which includes lower spending in other areas to offset the \$200 billion in the infrastructure plan, the senior official said. That's also drawn complaints from Democrats about reducing existing funding for transportation, though the White House official said programs such as the Highway Trust Fund -- which receives money from a federal fuel tax to spend on road and transit work -- would remain in place for the most part.

Some governors and mayors of cash-strapped towns and cities with aging infrastructure have said flatly that they need more federal help.

Trump, a former commercial real estate developer, has said that streamlining the environmental review and permitting process will give investors more certainty and by doing so, attract more financing and allow more projects to be completed. Key business groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have endorsed that approach.

The president signed an executive order in August establishing "one federal decision" for projects to eliminate duplication. The principles being released Monday call for changes including a 21-month deadline for environmental-review decisions and three months for permitting after that, the White House official said.

While the Natural Resources Defense Council and other green groups say Trump is trying to erode protections to help corporate interests and distract from a lack of funding, the White House official said core environmental requirements wouldn't be affected.

Turkey Becomes Top Destination for Iranian Travelers: Report

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Some 2.5 million Iranian tourists visited Turkey in 2017, making the country the top destination for Iranian holidaymakers, according to a report published by the Hotel Association of Turkey (TÜROB).

The number of Iranian tourists visiting Turkey is expected to continue rising this year, the report said, adding that Turkey may see a strong rise in visits by Iranians particularly in March during the Nevruz holiday in Iran.

Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Armenia followed Turkey as most popular destinations for Iranians last year.

In 2016, a total of 1.7 million Iranian tourists spent their holidays in Turkey.

The report noted that Iranians on average spend six nights in Turkey and spend \$1,000 per person versus \$630 other foreign tourists spend per capita.

TÜROB proposed the introduction of DEBIT cards as a solution to the problem. "Iranians can easily make their payments with DEBIT cards if this payment system is put in place," the association said.

The number of foreign arrivals in Turkey rose to 32.4 million in 2017 with a 27.8 percent year-on-year increase, data from the Tourism Ministry showed on Jan. 31.

Russia became the top tourist market of Turkey in 2017 with a 14.6 percent share in total arrivals, according to the ministry data.