

Iran Overtakes Qatar in South Pars With New Gas Phases



TEHRAN (Press TV) - Iran on Sunday will launch four new development phases of the world's largest gas field at South Pars with a capacity to produce 112 million cubic meters per day, the Ministry of Petroleum says.

President Hassan Rouhani will travel to Bushehr in the Persian Gulf to inaugurate two refineries built with \$10 billion of investment. With their launch, Iran's daily gas production will surpass that of Qatar with which it shares the offshore field.

The \$5 billion refinery for phase 13 is fully operational, with the first shipping of its gas condensate delivered on March 11 for export, the project's operator Payam Motamed said. Another refinery for phases 22,

23 and 24 will come online Sunday.

Each plant has a capacity to process 56 million cubic meters of gas per day and convert it to LPG, ethane, condensate and sulfur worth \$5.5 billion a year at the going market prices, the ministry's Shana news outlet said. The revenue, it said, will account for 2 percent of Iran's GDP of some \$427 billion.

Iran has divided development of South Pars to 24 onshore phases, all of which are now operational except for phase 11 and 14.

The refinery for phase 14 is about to come on stream in the next Persian calendar year which begins on March 21, according to ISNA news agency.

Iran had awarded development

of phase 11 to a consortium led by Total, but the French company left the project after the US threatened to impose sanctions on companies that do business in the country.

When Total left, China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) was to take over according to the contract, but the Chinese company also suspended investment in response to US pressure.

Nevertheless, state-run Chinese energy giant Sinopec has offered Iran a \$3-billion deal on further development of an Iranian oilfield the two countries are already working on, the Wall Street Journal reported in January.

The offshore development of South Pars includes three phases. In January, ISNA said Iran was in talks with several domestic companies to extract more oil from South Pars after foreign companies abandoned the plan.

According to Managing Director of Pars Oil and Gas Company Mohammad Meshkinfam, almost 25,000 barrels a day of oil are currently extracted from South Pars oil layers. Qatar, in comparison, produces 300,000 barrels a day.

Iran's development of the South Pars oil layers is still at the pilot phase, but the country sees positive prospects for 150,000 barrels per day of recovery in the currently producing reservoir.

PRTC Eyes Domestic Production of 7 Petrochemical Catalysts

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - CEO of the Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) Ali Pajouhan announced on Wednesday that Iran has broken the monopoly of the production of the SAC500 catalyst which was earlier manufactured by a few number of countries.

"We have managed to break the monopoly for production of the SAC500 catalyst which was in hands of 2 to 3 companies in the world," Pajouhan told reporters in a press conference in Tehran.

He added that the contract for industrialization of the catalyst with the capacity of producing 100 tons annually has been signed with Shazand petrochemical complex and it was injected into the relevant units.

The hi-tech SAC500 catalyst is widely used for producing heavy



polyethylene grades.

Pajouhan had also in December said that his company was building plants for the production of five catalysts used in the petrochemical industries.

Headed that the PRTC had signed

13 deals for commercialization of its products which also included catalyst production deals.

He underlined the eye-catching support of NPC for PRTC and protectionism, adding PRTC achievements were applied and functional in the industry but took some time to become profitable.

Pajouhan further added that PRTC was planning to launch 5 catalyst production plants which would come on-stream by the next two years.

Russia to Cooperate in Renovating Iran's Commercial Fleet



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Representatives from Russian industrialists have sealed an agreement with Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) to join a project for renovating the commercial fleet in Iran.

In a meeting between a visiting Russian industrial delegation and Deputy Head of IDRO Behzad Etemadi, the Russians accorded to help Iran renovate its commercial

fleet.

According to Etemadi, the Russian industrialists also voiced readiness for opening credit lines and other financial and industrial transactions between the two sides, as well.

The two sides also agreed to finalize some cooperation agreements simultaneous with the 15th Iran-Russia joint economic committee which is to be held within three months in Isfahan.

Crude Oil Rises Amid OPEC Supply Cuts, U.S. Sanctions on Iran, Venezuela

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Oil prices rose on Wednesday, pushed up by ongoing supply cuts from producer group OPEC and by U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela.

International Brent crude oil futures were at \$66.95 a barrel at 0751 GMT, up 28 cents, or 0.4 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$57.23 per barrel, up 36 cents, or 0.6 percent, from their last settlement. Oil prices have been pushed up this year by supply cuts led by the Middle East-dominated producer group of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Markets have been further tightened by the implementation of U.S. sanctions against oil exports from OPEC-members Iran and Venezuela.

In Venezuela, the worst blackout on record has left most of the South American country without power for six days, leaving hospitals struggling to keep equipment running, food rotting in the tropical heat and exports from the country's main oil terminal stranded.

National Australia Bank (NAB) said the oil market outlook was mixed, with downside price risk coming from economic growth concerns and strong oil supply growth from the United States, with OPEC's supply cuts and the U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela acting as price drivers.

Somalia to Get First Iranian Cement Cargo

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Head of Qeshm Free Zone Organization's Maritime Transport and Port Affairs Pejman Bahrami on Wednesday announced that over 14,000 tons of cement will soon be exported from the Iranian island to Somalia.

"A 14,500-ton cargo of bagged cement produced in Qeshm will be exported to Somalia on a

Tanzanian ship named AMINA-H via Kaveh dock," Bahrami told.

He added that loading of the cement cargo started on Tuesday and will take 4 to 5 days.

Iranian factories have the capacity to produce over 80 million tons of cement and clinker per year.

Iran exports cement to different countries including

Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar, Turkey, the UAE, Georgia, Oman, India, Somalia and China.

Iranian officials have underlined the country's capability to decrease dependence on oil revenues, stressing the US inability to reduce Iran's crude sales.

'UK Cuts Growth Forecast for 2019'



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain has lowered its official forecast for economic growth in 2019, finance minister Philip Hammond said on Wednesday as he delivered a half-yearly budget update.

The country's official budget forecasters expected gross domestic product would grow by 1.2 percent in 2019, down from a forecast of 1.6 percent they made when Hammond gave his full budget statement in October.

Economists had expected the growth outlook to be lowered because of Britain's failure to clear up the uncertainty about Brexit and a slowdown in the world economy.

Growth forecasts in 2020 and 2021 stood at 1.4 and 1.6 percent respectively, compared with forecasts of 1.4 percent for both years made in October.

The figures were prepared for Hammond by the Office for Budget

Responsibility. They assume Britain will secure a Brexit deal, avoiding the shock of leaving the European Union with no transition.

The UK economy grew by 0.2% in the three months to January, matching the growth of the previous three months.

The report from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed a pick-up in activity in January when the economy expanded by 0.5%.

The ONS said strength in IT, health services and wholesale trading offset falls in the manufacturing of metals and cars, and construction repair work.

The increase in wholesale could indicate stockpiling ahead of Brexit.

The total output of goods and services in the UK, or gross domestic product (GDP), grew by 0.2% in the three months to the end of January.

The services sector, which accounts for about 80% of the private sector economy, grew by 0.5% on a rolling three-month basis, mainly driven by wholesale and retail trade.

China Continues Boosting Gold Reserves as Part of Anti-Dollar Push

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The People's Bank of China increased its gold reserves for a third straight month in February, bringing total holdings to 1,874 tons, or 60.26 million ounces. The move is part of China's strategy to shift away from the U.S. dollar.

According to the central bank, it has added about 32 tons of the precious metal to its coffers in the last three months, purchasing some 10 tons in February.

Before December, the Chinese

central bank had not reported an increase in gold reserves for more than two years, and the official figures remained unchanged from October 2016 to November 2018. Analysts say Beijing is trying "to diversify its reserves" away from the greenback.

The uptick in gold holdings comes at a time when global central banks are hoarding the commodity. In January, China dropped to sixth place among the world's largest holders of

gold behind Russia.

The amount of gold added by global central banks in 2018 hit the second highest annual total on record, according to World Gold Council (WGC) estimates. Countries bought 651.5 metric tons of gold last year, and now hold nearly 34,000 tons. As a safe haven hedge, gold will become more attractive in 2019, due to greater market uncertainties and the expansion of protectionist economic policies, WGC forecasts.