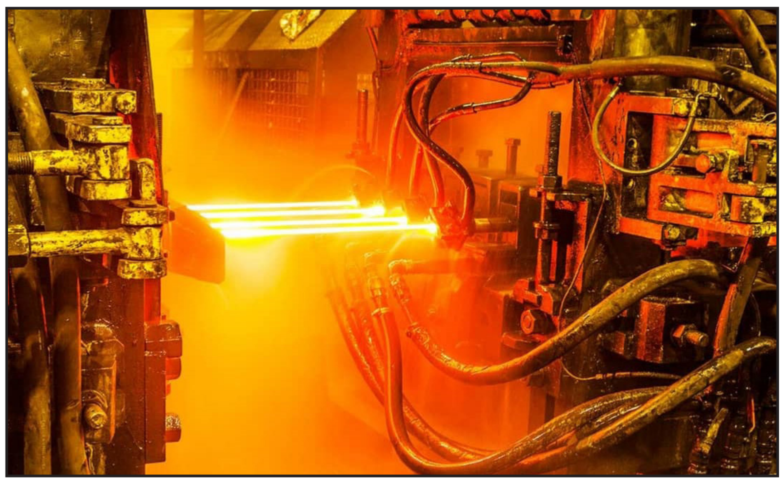
Iran's Steel Ingot Production Exceeds 15.3mn Tons: IMIDRO



TEHRAN (Dispatches) – **Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has reported that more than 15.3 million tons of steel ingot was produced in the country in the nine months of the current year (from March 21 to Dec. 22).**

In the same period, total steel production units in the country produced 15,398,370 tons of steel ingot including bloom, billet and slab, the report said.

Statistics showed that 1,729,142 tons of steel ingot were produced by Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) in the Iranian month of Azar (from Nov. 21 to Dec. 22), accounting for 18.2 percent of total steel production volume in the country.

It is expected that at least 26 million tons of steel ingot will be produced in the country before the termination of the current year (to end March 20, 2020), so, 40 to 45 percent of which is predicted to be exported from the country to the export markets.

Steel ingot production volume in the eight months of the current year (from March 21 to Nov. 22) registered a four percent growth as compared to the last year's corresponding period, IMIDRO added.

Kish Island-Iraqi Kurdistan Starts Direct Flights

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - **A direct flight has been launched between Iran's Persian Gulf Island of Kish and the Iraqi Kurdistan region's Sulaymanieh city.**

The first airplane carrying tourists from Sulaymanieh city landed in Kish Island.

Iran's Mahan Airline handled the first flight which brought 103 tourists from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region KRG to Kish Island.

The flight which was launched to facilitate visits and support tourism industry will be operated

every Sunday and Wednesday.

Director General of Kish Airports Ezzatollah Mohammadi told reporters that the flight was established after a year of follow-up.

"With the addition of this route, the number Kish International Airport's flights hits 21 domestic and foreign destinations," he said.

The establishment of the direct flight is significant for Kish Island as it will reinforce tourism industry in economic and commercial terms.

TFA to Cut Trade Costs 15%: Official

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – **A Member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mehdi Bakhshandeh said that once the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) is enforced, trade and business costs will be reduced by 13 to 15 percent.**

Bakhshandeh made the remarks in the 6th meeting of ICCIMA Representatives Board and added, "Effective steps have recently been taken for facilitating trade between member states of World Trade Organization (WTO)."

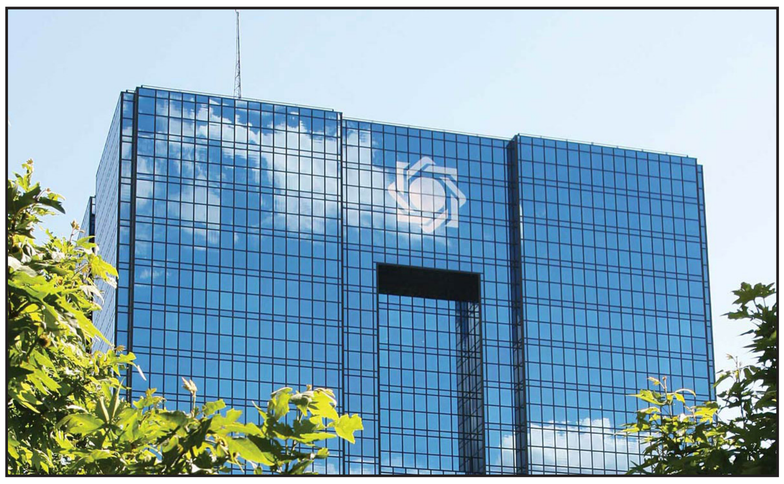
It has been for more than 11 years since the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) was compiled by the international experts in 2006 and came into effect in 2017.

He went on to say that this agreement enjoys high potential for reducing current costs and increasing the volume of trade exchange between countries.

Bakhshandeh pointed to the feasibility study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and added, "This study shows that TFA has decreased the trade and business costs between 12.5 to 17 percent."

Turning to one of the paragraphs stipulated in Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), he stated, "This paragraph obliges all countries to set up a National Trade Facilitation Committee. Given the fast-paced changes in the world, any law should be revised after some years."

Commercial Banks Owe $15.5bn to Iran's Central Bank: Report



Iran Central Bank headquarters

TEHRAN (Press TV) -Iranian commercial banks and financial institutions owe the central bank of the country a total of $15.5 billion, according to a report which disputes government claims it has managed to reduce borrowing from its coffers by nearly a third.

The report published on Sunday by the semi-official Fars news agency said total debt created by borrowing of banks from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) had reached 2,085 trillion rial.

It said the figure included borrowing from the CBI by state-run and private banks and other financial institutions, adding that overdraft fines and other costs had been included in the figure.

A recent statement by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani showed that the total debt of the Iranian banks as a result of borrowing from the CBI had been reduced from more than $11 billion to $8.2 billion.

The report by Fars, which was based on data provided by the CBI and calculations made by the Iranian parliament, disputed figures provided by Rouhani, saying they had ignored the fines on overdrafts and other costs incurred by the banks.

The report comes days after the CBI announced it was launching open market operation (OMO) policies to better control the borrowing market between the banks.

The launch of the policy, a first in Iran's banking history, is ultimately aimed at enabling the CBI to regulate the interest rate in the country.

The CBI launched its first round of OMO measures on Saturday by purchasing sukuk bonds issued by the government and owned by commercial banks.

It did not elaborate on any figure for the first trade but said a next round of purchase of the bonds under OMO will take place on Wednesday.

Global FDI Dips, Hit by Hong Kong Divestment, Brexit: UN

GENEVA (Reuters) - **Global direct foreign investment (FDI) dipped slightly around the world last year, hit by massive divestment in Hong Kong and a drop in flows into Britain due to Brexit uncertainty, the United Nations said on Monday.**

FDI could rise marginally in 2020 on the back of modest growth as trade tensions between China and the United States ease, but geopolitical uncertainties and protectionist pressures temper expectations, it said.

In 2019, global FDI flows were estimated at $1.39 trillion, down 1% from a revised $1.41 trillion in 2018, the UN trade and development agency UNCTAD said in a report.

FDI, which includes cross-border mergers and acquisitions (M&A), intra-company loans and investments, is a bellwether of globalization and a potential sign of future growth of corporate supply chains.

Investment flowing into the Chinese territory of Hong Kong, the Asian financial hub that has been wracked by political unrest, nearly halved last year to $55 billion, the report said.

"In Hong Kong there was $48 billion of divestment in terms of equi-

ty," James Zhan, UNCTAD's senior director of investment and enterprise, told Reuters. He noted that the former British colony was also affected by Sino-U.S. trade tensions.

Competition from Shanghai and Shenzhen in mainland China as well as Singapore for high-end FDI, such as regional business hub functions and R&D activities of multinationals, also weighs on Hong Kong, he said.

"Hong Kong's economy is a solid economy. Longer term-wise, it is attractive for international investment," Zhan said.

Britain, beset by uncertainty last year over the outcome of Brexit but now on course to leave the European Union on Jan. 31, saw inward FDI flows shrink by 6% to an estimated $61 billion last year, according to the report.

FDI flows to developed economies fell by 6% last year to an estimated $643 billion, and remained at a historically low-level, at half of their peak in 2007, it said.

FDI to the EU as a whole fell by 15% to $305 billion, as several countries experienced "strong volatility", it said.

The EU and some member states have tightened their FDI entry screening, particularly over "national security concerns", Zhan said, and this could deter some FDI especially in technology.

Oil Rises as Libyan Oilfields Shut Down

NEW YORK (CNBC) - **Oil prices rose to their highest in more than week on Monday after two large crude production bases in Libya began shutting down amid a military blockade, risking reducing crude flows from the OPEC member to a trickle.**

Brent crude was up 37 cents, or 0.6%, at $65.22 by 0952 GMT, having earlier touched $66 a barrel, the highest since Jan. 9.

The West Texas Intermediate contract was 24 cents, or 0.4%, higher at $58.78 a barrel, after rising to $59.73, the highest since Jan. 10.

Two major oilfields in southwest Libya began shutting down on Sunday after forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar closed a pipeline, potentially cutting national output to a fraction of its normal level, the National Oil Corporation (NOC) said.

The closure, which follows a blockade of major eastern oil ports, risked taking almost

all the country's oil output offline

However, the earlier rise in oil prices eased after some analysts and traders said supply disruptions in Libya could be offset by other producers, limiting the impact on global markets.

"The oil market remains well supplied with ample stocks and a healthy spare capacity cushion. In other words, the bullish price impact may prove to be fleeting," said Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM.

Takashi Tsukioka, president of the Petroleum Association of Japan (PAJ), also told a news conference that oil prices may fluctuate due to the latest incidents, but "we don't have to worry too much about demand and supply balance as OPEC can cover shortfalls."

If Libyan exports are halted for any sustained period, storage tanks will fill within days and production will slow to 72,000 barrels per day (bpd), an NOC spokesman said. Libya has been producing around 1.2 million bpd recently.