

Bank Mellat Gets \$1.6bn Compensation From UK



People pass by a Bank Mellat branch in Tehran.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Iran's Bank Mellat received compensation it had demanded from the UK after the lender won a court case against the British treasury in June.

In a letter to the Securities and Exchange Organization, Bank Mellat said it had received the "the amount agreed" with the UK treasury.

On June 18, London made a last-

minute deal to settle a £1.3 billion (\$1.6 billion) damage claimed by the bank.

Bank Mellat's lawsuit had initially claimed \$4 billion (£3.2 billion) from the British treasury, but that figure was later reduced to \$1.6 billion plus interest.

British daily the Times said Britain used a third country to avoid U.S. sanctions as it paid the Iranian

bank.

Bank Mellat, in which the Iranian government owns a 17 percent stake, sued the government over British sanctions imposed in 2009 that prevented it from doing business with the UK's financial sector.

The British Supreme Court ruled that the sanctions were illegal and a five-week hearing of the bank's claim for damages covering its loss of business had been scheduled for June.

Iranian Ambassador to London Hamid Baedinejad on Friday said the ruling that obliged the British government to pay compensation to Bank Mellat was a major legal victory for the Islamic Republic.

"The British government's compensation has been paid to Bank Mellat, which was to be paid to the bank based on a court ruling four months ago," Baedinejad said on his Twitter account.

"The compensation is based on a UK court ruling and because of the illegal sanctions imposed by the British Treasury against the Bank Mellat for several years since 2009," he added.

Reuters Report of Ships Stuck Outside Ports False



Bandar Emam Khomeini is a port city on the Persian Gulf in Khuzestan Province.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Iran has rejected a Reuters report that ships carrying imports of food and grain have been stuck outside two main ports in southern Iran simply because U.S. sanctions on the country are creating payment problems.

A senior government official in the southern Iranian province of Khuzestan on Thursday said ships carrying basic goods were waiting for discharge outside Imam Khomeini Port only because of increased import activity at the port.

The comments came after Reuters claims that at least 20 dry bulk ships carrying around one million tons of grains were waiting outside Imam Khomeini Port for unloading.

It further claims that other vessels had waited for weeks for their cargoes to be processed in the port and in Bandar Abbas, another major cargo port on the Persian Gulf.

Reuters suggested that lenders processing Iranian business were facing multiple hurdles to facilitate payments as financing channels freeze up.

However, the Iranian government source ruled out payment issues and said that the ships remained anchored mainly because there have been changes to Iran's import policies as the country seeks to increase inventories of basic goods and foods to cope with the sanctions.

"Assume that storage capacity in this port has been nearly three million tons but currently around six million tons of basic goods have entered this port," the official told Tasnim news agency, adding, "It is obvious that some ships should wait for discharge."

Iranian authorities said in August that imports for basic goods and foodstuffs have significantly increased this year amid efforts to offset the impacts of the American sanctions.

An official with Iran's agriculture ministry said separately that Tehran had since the 1980s aimed to ensure the country had sufficient stocks of grain.

"We have increased the amount of stockpiles because of Trump's policy towards Iran and tensions in the past months," the official said. "It is becoming more and more difficult because of the sanctions."

Food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies are exempt from sanctions Washington reimposed after U.S. President Donald Trump said he was walking away from a 2015 international deal over Iran's nuclear program.

But the U.S. measures targeting everything from oil sales to shipping and financial activities have deterred several foreign banks from doing any Iranian business, including humanitarian deals such as food shipments.

Painting of UK Chimp Parliament Rakes In £9.9mn

LONDON (AFP) -- A Banksy painting depicting the British parliament populated by chimpanzees smashed the record for the mysterious British street artist on Thursday, fetching nearly £9.9 million, Sotheby's auction house said.

The 2009 work entitled "Devolved Parliament" sold for £9,879,500 (\$12.1 million, 11.1 million euros) following a 13-minute battle between 10 different bidders.

"Record price for a Banksy painting set at auction tonight. Shame I didn't still own it," the artist said on his Instagram account.

The previous auction record for a Banksy artwork was \$1.87 million, achieved by "Keep it Spotless" at Sotheby's New York in 2008.

"Devolved Parliament" was expected to fetch £1.5 million to £2 million in Thursday's sale.

The oil painting measures 4.2 metres by 2.5 metres unframed – the largest known canvas by the anonymous artist.

It shows chimpanzees on the green benches of the House of Commons, from the viewpoint of the main entrance.

The sale comes after the controversial five-week suspension of Britain's parliament by Prime Minister Boris Johnson was deemed unlawful by the Supreme Court, with time running out before

Britain is due to leave the European Union on October 31.

Parliament was due to return on October 14 but instead reconvened on September 25 after Britain's highest court quashed the suspension.

When parliament returned, MPs spent their time angrily arguing over the suspension, and then arguing about whether their language in doing so was too strong.

Commons Speaker John Bercow said they were the most toxic scenes he had ever seen in his 22 years in the elected lower chamber.

"Inevitably what we have been seeing in the Houses of Parliament over the last few months and weeks has become a daily soap opera, not just in the UK... but also across the rest of Europe and indeed the world," Alex Branczik, Sotheby's European head of contemporary art, told AFP ahead of the sale.

"What he's pointing to here is the regression of the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world into tribalistic animalistic behaviour, the sort that we've seen broadcasted on our televisions," said Branczik.

"The real genius of Banksy is his ability to reduce this incredibly complex debate into one single simple image, which importantly is very readily shared in this age of social media and a

very image-consuming population."

Banksy first unveiled the painting, then entitled "Question Time", a decade ago for an exhibition in his home city of Bristol, southwest England.

He later reworked and retitled the painting, snuffing out the lights and making an upturned banana face downwards.

The seller bought the painting from Banksy in 2011.

"Potent and poignant, bold and brash, Banksy's monumental oil painting of the House of Commons offers a premonitory insight into the increasingly tumultuous face of politics in contemporary Britain," the sale catalogue says.

"His derivative art has provoked divisive opinion, but love him or hate him, his wide-reaching influence on contemporary art and urban culture cannot be denied."

It also notes: "This work is accompanied by a pest control certificate."

Banksy got the painting out again for March 29 this year, when Britain was originally due to leave the European Union.

Thursday's auction took place almost a year after Banksy's "Girl With The Balloon" partially shredded itself as the hammer came down at Sotheby's, becoming the freshly titled "Love Is In The Bin".

Hemmati: Rial Has Appreciated 40% in Past Year

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran's currency has appreciated 40% in the past year, the country's central bank governor said, recovering from historic lows reached after the U.S. abandoned the 2015 nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions.

Abdolnaser Hemmati said inflation had stabilized as the currency recovered, while the economy had recorded growth over the last 12 months despite the impact of sanctions and the threat of war, the Islamic Republic News Agency quoted him as saying Friday.

Iran's rial tumbled on the unregulated market after Donald Trump said he would pull his country out of the multilateral agreement.

The loss of revenues from oil exports, Iran's main source of hard currency, hit the currency hard, fueling inflation and shortages of some imports.

But it has been recovering for months on the open market after Iran took measures to preserve foreign currency and set up a government-run foreign-exchange platform to facilitate supply.

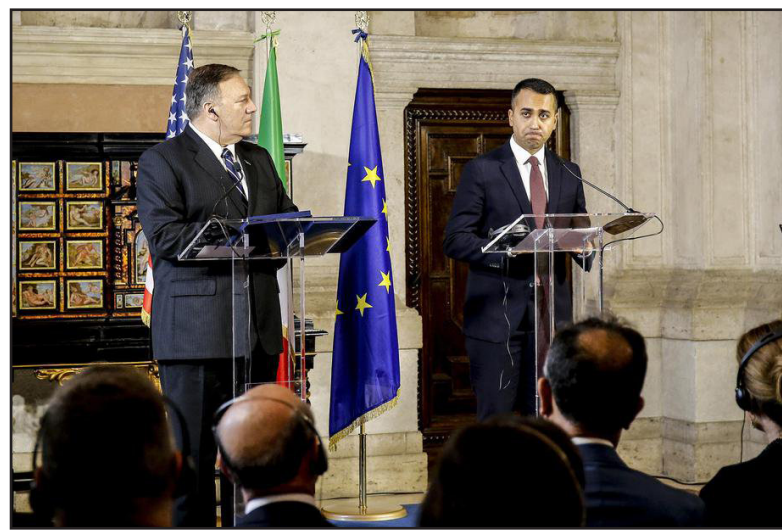
According to U.S. news maga-

zine Foreign Policy, social media networks played a key role in stoking fears of an economic downturn which prompted some families to convert their savings into dollars and euros after Iran came under intensified American sanctions.

Prior to the sanctions, one U.S. dollar was trading at 37,000 rials but immediately afterwards, it rose to 190,000 against the Iranian currency.

The rial is currently selling at more than 11,250 against a dollar on the unofficial market.

Pompeo Presses Italy on Banning Mahan Air



Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio (R) and U.S. State Secretary Mike Pompeo address a press conference following their meeting at Villa Madama in Rome, October 2, 2019.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has asked Italian officials to comply with Washington's sanctions on Iran and ban the Mahan Air carrier from accessing Italy's airspace.

Pompeo said in a meeting with Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio on Thursday that he was glad Italians were considering the ban on Iran's second biggest airline.

A transcription of Pompeo's remarks during the meeting, provided on the website of the U.S. Depart-

ment of State, indicated that Pompeo was actually welcoming Italy's decision not to renew Mahan Air's flight licenses.

However, there has been no official confirmation suggesting Rome has enacted such a ban. Thursday reports showed that Di Maio had responded to Pompeo's remarks on Mahan Air by saying that related authorities in Rome would make an announcement on the issue in the coming days.

Washington has included Mahan

Air in its list of sanctions on Iran alleging that the major carrier has been assisting the IRGC, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps which has been blacklisted by the U.S.

Italy has received rounds of waivers from the U.S. on Iran sanctions. It is not clear how the country will decide on Mahan Air, one of two airlines that operate flights between Iran and Italy, as such a ban could have impact relations between Tehran and Rome.

Pompeo used the Thursday meeting with his young Italian counterpart to highlight his government's pressure campaign against countries like Iran, China and Venezuela, saying the three were the most problematic for the U.S.

He told Di Maio that Italy should be cautious about dealing with China as a country that "uses its economic power to cultivate political influence and erode sovereignty."

He urged Rome to unite with the U.S. in the "necessary task" of confronting the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

He also welcomed Italy's continued alignment with European Union efforts to pressure Russia over a years-long crisis in Ukraine, saying sanctions on Moscow should remain until the situation in Ukraine is back to normal.

Energy Minister: Water Problem Over by 2012

TEHRAN (IFP) -- Iran's energy minister says the country plans to resolve its water problem by the end of the incumbent government's term in 2021.

Reza Ardakanian said we strive to meet the financial and non-financial needs for this project.

"We at the ministry of energy are looking forward to launching a major water and electricity project every week in the second half of this year, which will begin as of next week," he said.

The minister of energy reiterated that more than 220 large-scale projects of urban water supply, sewage, rural water, power plants including thermal and renewable energy and other projects nationwide will be put into operation and people would withstand how we made good use of the sanctions based on our domestic capabilities.

"Last summer, we were able to supply 150,000 megawatts more energy than the same period a year ago, and in a year named as the 'boom in production', two of the most important infrastructural products, i.e. water and energy, play an important role in the country's development," added Ardakanian.

Touching upon the importance of water management he said water is not less important than electricity, noting that the energy ministry plans to institutionalize the issue of proper consumption as a moral and cultural custom in the society. He mentioned that the role of media and NGOs is very crucial in this regard.

"The sustainability of development in our country and the resilience of our society depend more on ethical commitment, and the more ethical we are, the more resilient and developed we can be," he said.

OPEC Ready to Cut Oil Supply Further: Nigeria

LONDON (Dispatches) -- Nigeria and other members of OPEC are ready to cut crude supplies further if prices continue to tumble, according to the country's oil minister.

"Everybody agrees in OPEC that we need to stabilize the market. We cannot allow prices just to plummet," Nigerian Minister of State for Petroleum Resources Timipre Sylva said in a Bloomberg TV interview Friday.

The country is committed to complying fully with its new production quota of 1.774 million barrels a day, having over-produced in August. "We will cut down in September" and will fully comply this month, the minister said. Nigeria is currently pumping 1.69 million barrels a day amid a pipeline outage.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, collectively known as OPEC+, are due

to meet in Vienna in early December. Their current agreement for production cuts totaling 1.2 million barrels a day expires at the end of March.

Nigeria will discuss with OPEC whether output from its new Egina field, which came online earlier this year and pumps 200,000 barrels a day, is considered crude oil - therefore contributing to its OPEC target - or condensate, and thus exempt.

Meanwhile, Ecuador expects crude production to rise to 590,000 barrels-per-day (bpd) in 2020 after its planned withdrawal from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the energy minister said on Thursday.

The Andean producer is pulling out of OPEC to free itself from quota restrictions and hike output amid a cash squeeze.

Energy Minister Carlos Perez

told Reuters the withdrawal from the 14-member bloc was necessary because Ecuador was producing 548,000 bpd - above its OPEC quota of 528,000 bpd - and did not feel right being non-compliant.

"They haven't reprimanded us, but we feel uncomfortable not respecting the agreements," he said.

"We hope to reach 560,000 bpd this year and next year we will be at an average 590,000 bpd daily ... We need to increase production because of the economic situation ... to have enough money for investments."

Ecuador is running a wide fiscal deficit and has a hefty foreign debt. It reached a \$4.2 billion deal with the International Monetary Fund in February and cut fuel subsidies this week in a package of measures that have brought the biggest street protests in years.