

Iran's Non-Oil Exports Exceed \$46bln in Eleven Months

TEHRAN (FNA) - Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Valiollah Afkhami Rad announced that Iran exported approximately \$46.3bln of various kinds of non-oil goods in the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2014-February 20, 2015).

Afkhami Rad said that the figure showed 22 percent growth in comparison with the same period last year.

He further said that Iran's trading during the said period reached \$94.5bln, which would increase by \$110bln if service exports are added.

The Iranian trade official continued Iran's exports during the first ten months of Iranian calendar year reached \$42.6bln which would increase to \$52bln if services exports are considered. The amount rose by 27 percent comparing to similar period last year.

Iranian exports included propane, polyethylene, butane, pistachio, ethanol, sour and cement which were mainly sent to China, Iraq, the UAE, Afghanistan and India.

Iran's trading with Asia included 92 percent of its entire trading. Europe and Africa's share of Iranian

exports hit respectively 5 and 2.1 percent.

In January, Iranian First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri underscored the necessity for cutting dependence on oil revenues and increasing exports of non-oil products.

"Special increase in the volume of non-oil exports constitutes the government's most important approach," Jahangiri said.

"To reach this goal, any obstacle on the way of the Iranian exporters should be removed in addition to granting special facilities to non-oil exports," he added.

Spanish, US Metallurgy Giants Announce Merger

MADRID (AFP) - Spanish metallurgy giant FerroAtlantica and its US peer Globe Speciality Metals said Monday they had agreed to merge to form a leading producer of silicon metal worth \$3.1 billion (2.7 billion euros).

The deal was unanimously approved by the boards of the two companies and the deal is expected to close in the fourth quarter, they said in a statement.

Silicon metal has several industrial uses, including as an alloying agent able to increase the strength of aluminium as well as to make solar panels.

Silicon based polymers can appear in many every day products such as lubricants, greases, resins, skin and hair products.

"Globe's combination with Fer-

roAtlantica creates a premier global player in the fast-growing silicon metal industry and combines two best-in-class companies," Globe's executive chairman Alan Kestenbaum said in the statement.

"This deal gives Globe shareholders a company with greater international reach, a broader production base and opportunities for further cost reductions on an already low-cost platform."

The deal will produce operational synergies of \$65 million per year from economies of scale, better procurement of raw materials and reduced freight costs from improved logistics, the companies said.

The companies said the new entity would take advantage of Globe's strong presence in North America

and FerroAtlantica's footprint in Europe.

Miami-based Globe operates 11 production facilities and three mining sites in six countries, with nearly 90 percent of its revenues coming from North America.

FerroAtlantica operates 15 production plants and five mining sites in five countries as well as hydro-electric power plants in Spain and France, with a majority of its revenues coming from Europe.

The new company will employ around 4,700 people around the world and will be listed on the Nasdaq exchange.

Grupo Villar Mir, the parent of FerroAtlantica, will own 57 percent of the new company and Globe shareholders the rest.

Iran, Russia Eager to Cooperate on Mining Sector

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian and Russian ministers said in a meeting on Monday that expansion of Tehran-Moscow cooperation in the mining sector will be very fruitful for both countries.

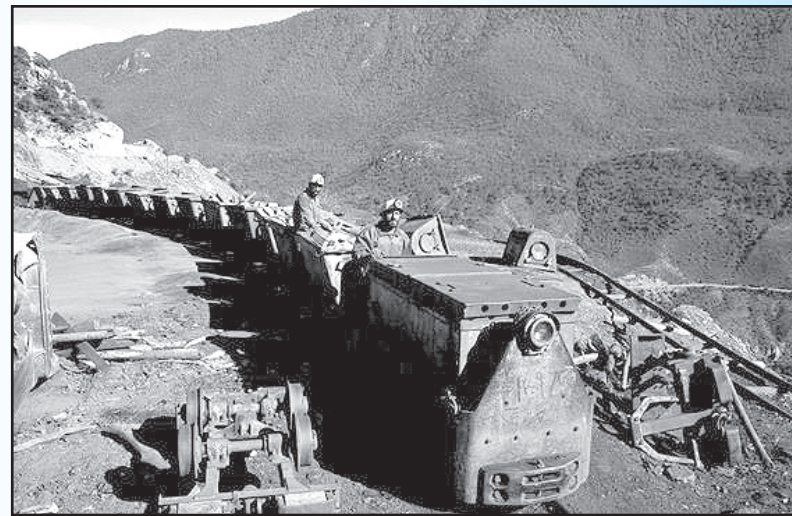
In a meeting between Iranian Minister of Industries, Mines and Trade Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh and Russian Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Sergey Donskoy, the Iranian official said Russia is capable in geological and mining studies and this can serve as an important factor for enhancement of bilateral interactions.

He further added that Iran has a plan to develop its mines and welcomes cooperation with other countries, especially Russia, adding that the two countries have had mutual cooperation background in this field.

The Iranian minister referred to some primary agreements reached between Russia and IMIDRO (Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation) to cooperate on exploration and development of Zarshouran Mine (gold mine in West Azarbaijan), Angouran (lead and zinc in Zanjan) and Sangan (iron ore in Khorassan Razavi).

Nematzadeh pointed to joint studies which have been conducted with neighboring and African countries by his ministry and said the parties to the joint surveys

natural resources capacity as one of the advantages of Iran and said it is expected that through joint cooperation in the field of location and exploitation of mineral



Iran says it wants Russia's help over the exploration of its underground mineral resources.

have been Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and a number of African countries.

Donskoy, for his part, voiced Moscow's willingness for deepening trade, industrial and mining relations with Iran, and expressed the hope that cooperation would be expanded particularly in geology and underground resources.

He pointed to the mineral and

reserves expansion of interactions would be realized.

Over the last several years, Iran and Russia have had vast cooperation in different fields, specially in political and economic spheres.

The two states also enjoy special positions on the international scene and have long had constant and regular consultations on key regional and global issues.

CBI Puts Iran's Inflation At 15.8%

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Central Bank of Iran on Monday announced that the country's inflation rate in the year ending in the Iranian month of Bahman (January 21) stood at 15.8% compared with the same period last year.

The CBI announcement said that the price of commodities and services in urban areas in the month of Bahman showed 0.8 percent growth compared to the preceding month.

It said that inflation rose up by 16.2 percent compared to the same month last year.

The CBI had previously announced the country's inflation rate in the year ending in the Iranian month of Dey (started December 22) at 16.3% compared with the same period last year.

German Business Confidence Rises as QE Outweighs Greece

BERLIN (Bloomberg) - German business confidence rose for a fourth month as faster economic growth and optimism over European Central Bank stimulus outweighed fears of a worsening Greek crisis.

The Ifo institute's business climate index, based on a survey of 7,000 executives, advanced to 106.8 in February from 106.7 in January. The median estimate of 37 economists in a Bloomberg News survey was for an increase to 107.7.

Growth in Europe's largest economy is accelerating amid lower oil prices and a weaker euro, and Germany's Bundesbank plans to increase its forecasts for 2015. With the ECB set to start buying 60 billion euros (\$68 billion) a month of debt to bolster the euro-area economy, the risk of a Greek default and exit from the union hasn't weighed much on business sentiment.

The report signals that "German businesses never feared a full escalation of the Greek crisis or were at least not afraid of a Grexit," said Carsten Brzeski, chief economist at ING-DiBa AG in Frankfurt. "Improved expectations signal a strong belief in the benefits of the ECB's quantita-

tive easing."

A measure of current conditions dropped to 111.3 in February from 111.7 the previous month, the Ifo report showed. A gauge of expectations climbed to 102.5 from 102.

The euro extended its decline and was down 0.5 percent at \$1.1324 at 10:07 a.m. Frankfurt time. Germany's DAX Index of stocks was up 0.5 percent at 11,103.

Greece's wrangling over its bailout package, which could see the government unable to finance itself, still clouds the outlook for Europe. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has until the end of Monday to complete a list of policies in return for continued funding from international creditors. European Union finance chiefs will then decide whether the proposals go far enough or need another round of emergency negotiations.

In Germany, manufacturing grew and services picked up pace in February, according to a Purchasing Managers Index by Markit Economics. Rheinmetall AG, a maker of car parts and defense equipment, reported 2014 profits exceeded its estimates because of record earnings at the

auto-components unit.

The Bundesbank said on Feb. 16 that 2015 growth will probably exceed its December forecast of 1 percent. The European Commission this month forecast 1.5 percent.

German investor confidence rose to the highest level in a year in February, buoyed by the imminent arrival of fresh central-bank stimulus, a report by the ZEW Center for European Economic Research in Mannheim showed last week.

The ECB will start its 1.14 trillion-euro bond-buying program in March as it seeks to avoid a deflationary spiral in the euro area. The plan was opposed by the German members of the Governing Council, Jens Weidmann and Sabine Lautenschlaeger, who said lower energy costs and existing measures are already providing stimulus.

"We do see significant potential for a larger step-up in German growth," said Greg Fuzesi, an economist at JPMorgan Chase & Co. in London. "Growth may even accelerate a bit further as commodity prices reach their lows in the current quarter and the growth contributions from the currency and sentiment rise."

U.S. Stocks Drop as Oil Slides; Europe Equities Gain

NEW YORK (Bloomberg) - U.S. stocks fell from records as oil dropped below \$50 a barrel, while the dollar strengthened against emerging-market currencies. European equities advanced with bonds from Italy to Portugal as investors reacted to the extension of Greece's bailout.

The Standard & Poor's 500 Index slid 0.3 percent at 10:03 a.m. in New York after closing at an all-time high on Friday. The Stoxx Europe 600 Index added 0.6 percent, while Portugal's 10-year rate reached 2.118 percent, below its U.S. equivalent. The dollar strengthened before Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen addresses Congress this week. The ruble slid 3.6 percent in offshore trading after Moody's Investors Service downgraded Russia to junk. Oil lost 2.6 percent in New York.

The government in Athens has until the end of Monday to complete a list of policies in return for the continued funding after talks concluded late on Feb. 20. Moody's joined S&P in ranking Russia's debt as non-investment grade, citing the conflict in Ukraine and plunging oil prices. Sales of existing U.S. homes fell more than forecast last month.

"We have indexes at all-time highs, the Nasdaq is close to breaking 5,000, and we're in an environment where central bank liquidity is plentiful across the globe," said Andreas Nigg, head of equity and commodity strategy at Vontobel Asset Management in Zurich. "It's difficult to call an end to the bull market. News about a deal on Greece is decent."

U.S. stocks posted their longest streak of weekly gains since the beginning of December as Greece reached a deal to extend its bailout program and investors speculated the Fed will keep rates lower for longer.

The Nasdaq Composite Index ended last week on an eight-day winning streak that took the gauge to 4,955.97, less than 2 percent away from a record. The S&P 500 climbed 0.6 percent last week and the Dow rose to its first record of the year.

Investors are waiting for economic data to gauge the strength of the economy. Sales of previously owned U.S. homes probably fell 4.9 percent in January, more than the 1.8 percent economists projected. They will get further clues this week as Yellen testifies before Congress.

They're also watching the situation in Greece after its Feb. 20 agreement with creditors. The Greek reform measures are still subject to validation by the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission, the institutions collectively known as the troika which Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras vowed not to recognize.

"Markets have reacted positively in terms of risk sentiment and we're seeing the periphery doing very well" because of the Greek deal, said Owen Callan, a fixed-income strategist at Cantor Fitzgerald LP in Dublin. "It takes away the big short-term event risk, even if a medium-term risk is still there."

Spanish bonds advanced with their counterparts among Europe's higher-

yielding government bonds, pushing the 10-year yield 10 basis points lower to 1.40 percent.

The Stoxx 600 advanced for a fifth day to extend the highest level since 2007. The U.K.'s FTSE 100 Index surpassed a record close in intraday trading before slipping 0.3 percent as lower-than-projected profit at HSBC Holdings Plc pushed the stock lower.

Greece's ASE Index slipped 4.5 percent last week. The market was closed on Monday for a holiday. Spain's IBEX 35 Index climbed 0.8 percent for one of the biggest rallies among 18 western-European markets.

Greek government bonds rose for a fourth day, with the three-year note yield dropping 180 basis points, or 1.80 percentage point, to 14.819 percent, the lowest since Jan. 28.

"Greece will still be an issue for the market for some time," said Kevin Lilley, who helps manage 15 billion pounds (\$23 billion) as head of European equities at Old Mutual Global Investors U.K. in London. "If we can get the agreement made in the next couple of days, which is necessary for this extension, then hopefully the market can pop that to one side for a few months and focus on the underlying economy, which is steadily improving."

The Swiss franc weakened with core government bonds on reduced demand for haven assets, depreciating 0.4 percent to 1.07273 per euro. The dollar strengthened 0.5 percent to \$1.1321 per euro and the Bloomberg Dollar Spot Index advanced 0.2 percent.