NIOC, Europe Seal New Oil Sale Deals

TEHRAN (MNA) – **An NIOC official has announced the signing of new crude sale deals with a number of European oil companies.**

Seyed Mohsen Ghamsari, Executive Director for International Affairs at National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), touched upon inking fresh agreements to export Iranian crude oil to European countries saying "following the previously sealed contracts with companies like France's Total, Iran's crude will be sold to several new customers in the green continent."

Ghamsari stressed that the names of new buyers will be announced once the signed contracts become operational.

In response to a question about exports of crude oil to Greece, the official asserted "NIOC has reached final agreement with Hellenic Petroleum S.A. of Greece and oil sales to the European country have begun.

NIOC has inked a deal with Greek Hellenic Petroleum following the oil sale agreements with France's total, Lukoil of Russia, Spain's Cepsa.

Iranian Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs Amir Hossein Zamaninia had described the fresh round of negotiations between Iran and Greece adding "during a recent visit to the European country, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was sealed for meeting Hellenic Petroleum's debt to Iran."

NIOC's Executive Director for International Affairs Ghamsari also highlighted that exports of Iran's oil to South Africa has not kicked off yet.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh had recently announced that the volume of Iran's oil and condensate exports has surpassed two million barrels per day in early days of the new Iranian calendar year (Began March 20).

No Iranian Airline Needs Saudi Skies

TEHRAN (Press TV) **An official in Iran's government has downplayed a Saudi ban to keep Iranian airliners off Saudi Arabia's skies, saying the country's air carriers have no need for the KSA airspace.**

Ebrahim Moradi, head of air traffic control of Iran Airports and Air Navigation Company (IAANC), told the official IRNA news agency on Tuesday that following the recent cut in bilateral diplomatic ties, no Iranian airline company has scheduled flights to Saudi cities.

Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran on January 3 following demonstrations held in front of the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in the northeastern city of Mashhad by angry protesters censuring the Al Saud regime for the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in Riyadh a day earlier.

Moradi pointed to the recent Saudi ban on Iran's Mahan Air company, saying Riyadh's decision will not impact the Iranian airline as the company currently operates no flights to African nations via the Persian Gulf Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) said Monday that Mahan Air was banned due to violations of local safety rules.

The GACA said in a statement that several violations related to airline safety had been committed by Mahan Air, "prompting the suspension of licenses granted to the company."

"This decision comes in the context of the GACA (regarding) the safety of passengers and to preserve their lives," Reuters reported.

Trade between Iran and Saudi Arabia has mostly been small and each year only Iranian pilgrims travel to the kingdom for the hajj pilgrimage.

Several countries, including Pakistan, Russia and China, have so far voiced readiness to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia to ease up their tensions.

Fiat to Buy Iran Khodro's Share

TEHRAN (FNA)- **Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is due to visit Tehran next Tuesday at the head of a big trade delegation, an Iranian economic official announced, adding that Italian automaker, Fiat SpA, is due to buy a block of the Middle-East's largest carmaker, Iran Khodro Company (IKCO)'s share.**

"The Italian prime minister will visit Iran at the head of a trade delegation consisting of 100 businesspersons active in different industrial fields," Head of Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce Ahmad Pourfallah told FNA on Wednesday.

Asked about the results of consultations between Fiat SpA and the Middle-East's largest automaker, IKCO, he said, "They have reached a landmark point in their talks and have good interaction."

Pourfallah added that both companies are due to set up a joint firm with Fiat purchasing a block of IKCO's stocks.

A delegation of Fiat SpA was in Tehran in February to hold talks on joint ventures with IKCO.

The 12-strong delegation of Fiat SpA company visited Iran Khodro's production line in the capital. They also took a trip to the Northwestern province of Khorassan Razavi to visit Iran Khodro's production line there.

Following a nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers, the race has tightened for access to Iran's auto market. European automakers, which were forced to leave the Iranian market after international sanctions on the Islamic Republic for its nuclear program, are now trying to restore their previous shares in Iran's vast car market.

About 370 Italian traders, including representatives of steel group Danieli, energy company Enel, agricultural machinery maker CNH Industrial, Telecom Italia and several banks, visited Iran to discuss business opportunities.

Fiat, which controls Chrysler, and its subsidiary heavy-truck maker Fiat Industrial SpA halted sales to Iran in 2012 following similar moves by other carmakers under US pressure to cut ties with Tehran.

The automobile industry accounts for nearly 10 percent of Iran's gross domestic product. The latest data shows that Iran ranks 18th on the list of the world's top auto manufacturers. However, the country's automotive industry needs modernization.

Qeshm FTZ Planning to Produce 170,000b/d of Oil

QESHM (IRNA) – **Managing Director of Qeshm Free Trade Zone Hamidreza Momeni said his organization is planning to produce 170,000 barrels of heavy oil per day.**

According to the official, the amount will be added to the extraction of 125,000 barrels of oil through four oil projects underway on the island.

He said that the Qeshm FTZ is assigned to produce minimum 35 and maximum 60 million cubic liters of gas on a daily basis during the new Iranian year (started March 21).

It has also a clear agenda for extracting oil and producing petrochemical items, Momeni added.

He said that the Qeshm FTZ is also considering production of eight million tons of downstream petrochemical items.

This is while the project to reserve 100 million barrels of oil is almost half finished, Momeni noted.

He said the organization has also plans to produce 84,000 tons of cage-cultured fish.

Iran and Norway have already signed an agreement to produce 5,000 tons of cage-cultured fish with the participation of the Iranian private sector as well as a Norwegian company.

Iranian officials said that the MoU is worth 500 billion rials (about $16,515m).

The Qeshm FTZ is also to provide necessary grounds for establishing financial markets with a number of Japanese and Arab countries.

According to the managing director, the organization is also to set up its own airliner with the possible investment of Canada's Bombardier Company.

A total of 1,000 megawatts of electricity will be introduced by the FTZ of which 70 megawatts is already on stream, the official added.

Projects in the field of oil, gas, tourism and other major projects in the fields of steel, energy, water and electricity which have been planned for Qeshm would play a significant role in the economic progress of the region, he added.

Seifollahi also said that investment in different sectors in the zone is economical regarding the government's strategy and supportive plan of Qeshm Free Zone for businessmen.

Qeshm is the biggest Iranian island in the Persian Gulf region near the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

It houses 117,000 inhabitants in an area of 1,500 square kilometers.

The island is a rectangular form with 135km length and 14km of average width.

The island is bigger than 22 countries of the world put together.

Qeshm Island has excellent tourism and recreation capacities with the first ever international Geopark of the Middle East designed and implemented across it.

It is also destination to millions of domestic and international tourists who travel here to enjoy its unique natural beauties.

Oil installations on the island, too, will become a major oil terminal in the Persian Gulf.

They are being built to export and import various types of crude oil, gas condensate and various laboratory products to pave the way for establishment of a big, modern oil center in the Persian Gulf, which would become a major oil products bourse.

The plan for building oil installations on Qeshm island includes installing tanks for storing refined products including gasoline, diesel, fuel oil and kerosene, establishing docks and marine loading facilities to import gasoline and diesel as well as bunkering installations in Persian Gulf.

Nokia to Cut Thousands of Jobs Following Alcatel Deal

HELSINKI/PARIS (Reuters) - **Telecom network equipment maker Nokia is planning to cut thousands of jobs globally, including 1,400 in Germany and 1,300 in its native Finland, as part of a cost-cutting programme following the acquisition of Alcatel-Lucent earlier this year.**

In France, Nokia said on Wednesday it will cut only 400 jobs, but will also create 500 posts in research and development, in line with a promise to the French government last year when it was negotiating the Alcatel deal.

"The pledges made by Nokia when it bought Alcatel-Lucent have been kept," said Frédéric Aussedat, a representative of the CFE-CGC union in France.

Nokia declined to give a total figure for global job cuts. The company employs about 6,850 people in Finland, 4,800 in Germany, 4,200 in France and around 104,000 around the world.

"This (1,300) is a terrible figure, we have rather difficult employment situation in the sector to begin with," Pertti Porokari, chairman of the Union of Professional Engineers in Finland, said. "Seems that Finnish workers have lost this match (against the French)."

Nokia took control of Franco-American Alcatel-Lucent in January following its 15.6 billion euro (13 billion pounds) all-share offer, intended to help it compete with Sweden's Ericsson and China's Huawei [HWT.UL] in a market where limited growth and tough competition are pressuring prices.

Nokia is seeking 900 million euros of operating cost synergies from the Alcatel deal by 2018.

The Nokia headquarters is seen in Espoo, Finland.