

# Iran, EAEU Sign Free Trade Deal



Photo published by Iran's official IRNA news agency shows Iran's Deputy Trade Minister Alireza Peymanpak (R) and EAEU Minister of Trade Andrey Slepnev shaking hand after signing a free trade agreement in Tehran on January 19, 2023.

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Trade Minister Alireza Peymanpak and EAEU Minister of Trade Andrey Slepnev in Tehran have signed a free trade agreement to allow tariff-free exports for more than 90% of their products.

Peymanpak said after signing the deal that it will go into force within the next nine months after being approved by the governments and parliaments of Iran and five EAEU members: Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus.

He said administrative governments of EAEU countries are expected to formally approve the free trade agreement with Iran over the next few weeks.

The official, who also serves as head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, said the document signed on Thursday identified certain products and excluded them from the free trade deal between Iran and the EAEU.

Peymanpak added, however, the deal will enable tariff-free exports for more than 90% of products of the two sides.

The EAEU's executive branch the EEC and Iran signed a temporary agreement in December 2021 to set up a free trade zone.

Russia's Tass news agency quoted Slepnev as saying on Thursday that Iran and the EAEU had agreed on a bulk of main issues needed to conclude talks for creating a free trade zone.

Iran signed a preferential trade agreement with the EAEU in November 2019 amid efforts by the Iranian government to diversify trade routes and to offset the impacts of American sanctions on the country's economic exchanges with the rest of the world.

The value of trade between Iran and the EAEU rose by 74% year-on-year in 2021 and by another 25% in the first ten months of 2022, according to

figure by the EEC.

Iranian government figures also show that bilateral trade with the EAEU rose 66% in value terms in the year to late March 2022 to stand at \$5.634 billion.

And also, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari and Andrey Slepnev discussed ways on expanding economic cooperation between the Islamic Republic and Eurasia.

Safari proposed that a corridor is formed for transport through rail, road and sea routes so that free trade of agricultural and industrial goods can be carried out among Iran and the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Commission; namely, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

The Iranian official said that cooperation between the union and the Islamic Republic can go beyond trade and expanded into areas such as energy, as well as banking and tourism.

He announced Iran's readiness to begin work to boost cooperation in those fields.

The country's interaction with the Eurasian Economic Union entered a new phase on October 27, 2019 when a preferential trade agreement (PTA) took effect between the two sides.

Parties are now engaged in negotiations to upgrade the PTA to a free trade agreement (FTA).

Andrey Slepnev briefed Safari on those negotiations, expressing hope that talks with the Iranian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Mines are finalized during his current trip to Tehran.

The Eurasian official also said that the EEU is determined to promote cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## OPEC Reports 6.7% Increase in Iran's Oil Output in 2022

TEHRAN - Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has reported that Iran increased its oil production last year despite continued U.S. restrictions on the country's oil trade with the rest of the world.

Figures and tables from an OPEC monthly report published by local news agencies on Wednesday showed that Iran had produced an average of 2.554 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil last year, up

162,000 barrels or 6.7% from 2021.

The data showed that Iran's 2022 oil output was an increase of more than 28% compared to 2020 when the country had lost much of its crude sales because of US sanctions.

Higher output figures reported by OPEC for Iran in 2022 come against the backdrop of unconfirmed reports suggesting that the country exported more oil last year despite continued

American pressure on the country.

A report by Reuters news agency published over the weekend showed that Iran's oil exports in late 2022 had reached records not seen since the country came under US sanctions nearly five years ago.

The report cited figures from international tanker tracking services showing that Iran's oil exports had reached up to 1.23 million bpd in late 2022.

## Masjid Soleyman Petrochemical Plant to Boost Output



TEHRAN -- The CEO of Masjid Soleyman Petrochemical Plant Mehdi Mohammadi has announced plans to increase the production capacity of this complex by 10 to 15%.

Addressing a press conference Mohammadi said, Masjid Soleyman Petrochemical Plant

came online with a 2-year delay in 2021 due to the Covid-19 outbreak, saying the delay resulted in the company repaying the installments to the Chinese financier with a delay.

He underlined the effort of Masjid Soleyman Company to manage the balance of expenses

compared to its income, and added: "Construction of this complex in the deprived area of Masjid Soleyman was the greatest service to the people of that region."

Masjid Soleyman Petrochemical Plant's CEO continued: "This company has created jobs for about 500 people directly and about 700 people indirectly."

Muhammadi announced the annual nominal capacity of Masjid Soleyman petrochemical plant at 1,075 tons of urea granules and 680 tons of ammonia.

He said up to 20% of the urea output of the plant will be delivered to agricultural services and 80% of products exported.

## Tehran, Minsk Call for Expanding Cooperation in Agriculture

TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran and Belarus have stressed the need for bolstering mutual ties in field of agriculture.

Referring to the cruel sanctions imposed on Iran and Belarus, the director of the Iranian Research Institute of Plant Protection (IRIPP) Hussein Ranjbar Aghdam said that the two coun-

tries should expand their bilateral relations.

Ranjbar Aghdam added that further steps could be taken in import and export areas.

Iran pays close attention to the quality of the agricultural process, he further noted.

The country utilized the minimum amount of chemicals in

agriculture, he said, adding that the amount will be minimized via advanced science in the future.

The Belarus side expressed hope that during the Belarusian president's visit to Iran, a cooperation agreement between the two states would be inked in a bid to protect plants.

## Wall Street Appears Headed for First Weekly Loss of 2023

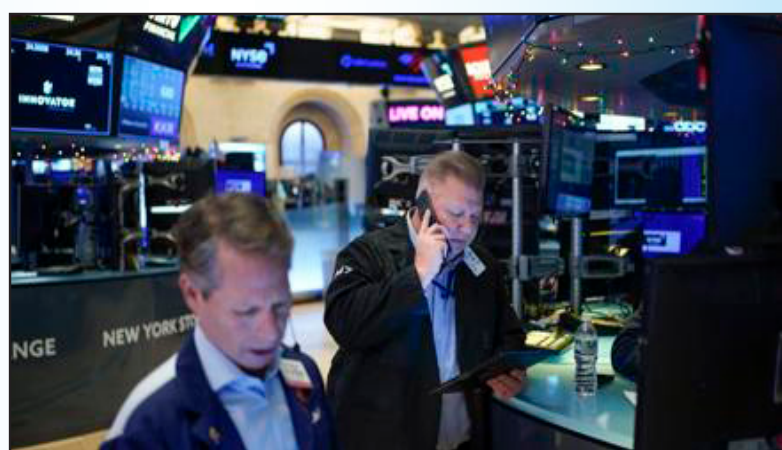
NEW YORK (AP) - Premarket trading on Wall Street was mixed Friday as recession fears threaten to drag major indexes to their first weekly decline of the year.

Futures for the Dow are flat after early declines, while the S&P 500 is up 0.3%. The Dow is down almost 4% this week, the S&P is down 2.5%, and the tech heavy Nasdaq composite is down 2% this week amid tens of thousands of layoffs across the sector.

Growing concern that the Federal Reserve and other central banks will keep interest rates elevated for an extended period — even if it means letting major economies slip into recession — has gripped markets this week.

In separate appearances Thursday, Fed board member Lael Brainard and European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde affirmed plans to maintain heightened interest rates despite hints that inflation and economic growth is cooling.

"That again implies more hikes to come and then a long hiatus, not the imminent reversal markets are pricing for," Rabobank said in a report.



Recent economic data has shown weakness in the U.S. housing industry and manufacturing in the mid-Atlantic region, though they weren't as bad as expected and the job market appears healthy. Those followed worse readings than expected Wednesday on retail sales, a cornerstone of the economy, and industrial production.

Some economists expect a U.S. recession this year but most expect that if it does occur, it will be brief.

The Fed's key lending rate is 4.25% to 4.50%, up from close to zero one year ago. Its next rate decision will be announced Feb.

1. Analysts expect an increase of 0.25 percentage points, smaller than previous hikes of up to 0.75 percentage points.

Job cuts in the technology sector continued Friday, with Google parent company Alphabet announcing that it was laying off 12,000 workers. Earlier this week, Microsoft announced 10,000 job cuts, or nearly 5% of its workforce. Amazon is cutting 18,000 jobs and Facebook parent Meta is shedding 11,000 positions.

Other tech companies have also announced staff reductions that come after rapid expansion in the sector during the pandemic.

## Gold Darts Toward Fifth Weekly Rise on Slower Rate-Hike Hopes

NEW YORK (Kitco) - Gold prices scaled their highest levels since late April on Friday and were on track for a fifth consecutive weekly gain amid anticipation of slower rate hikes from the U.S. Federal Reserve and fears of a possible recession.

Spot gold was little changed at \$1,929.70 per ounce. Prices rose 0.5% this week so far. U.S. gold futures rose 0.4% to \$1,931.80.

Also helping is "the desire to mitigate risk from factors such as inflationary forces, how the central banks are managing them, and mixed views over the outlook for equities

against an uncertain economic backdrop."

Fed funds futures are pricing in a smaller 25-basis-point interest rate increase by the U.S. central bank at the conclusion of its two-day meeting on Feb. 1, after recent economic data showed signs of cooling inflation.

Gold tends to gain when rate hike expectations recede because lower rates reduce the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding bullion.

The dollar was 0.1% higher but was set for a weekly decline, making gold a more attractive bet for those holding other currencies.

## Amazon Begins Layoffs of 18,000 Workers

LONDON (Reuters) - Thousands of Amazon workers woke up to a brutal email from their employer informing them their role had 'been eliminated' effective immediately.

Around 18,000 staff were let go in the latest round of job cuts first announced by CEO Andy Jassy in November.

The layoffs are the latest in the U.S. technology sector, with companies cutting their bloated workforce and slashing costs to reverse pandemic-era excesses and prepare for a worsening global economy.

The company is terminating 2,300 employees in Seattle and Bellevue, according to an update on the Worker Adjustment



and Retraining Notification (WARN) site. The U.S. labor law requires companies planning a mass layoff to inform employees 60 days before the closure.

Amazon.com Chief Executive Andy Jassy said earlier this

month the cuts, about 6% of the company's roughly 300,000 corporate employees, would mostly impact the e-commerce and human resources divisions. Microsoft said earlier on Wednesday it would cut about 10,000 jobs and take a \$1.2-billion charge.