

Iraq Allocates Budget to Key Railway Link to Iran



TEHRAN - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for economic diplomacy Mehdi Safari has said that the Iraqi government has for a first time allocated a budget to a key railway project that links the country's southern port of Basra to Iran's border town of Shalamcheh.

Safari said on Thursday that the two countries had reached an agreement to start the long-anticipated construction works for the 32-kilometer railway project after the holy month of Ramadan in late April.

"Iraq has allocated a budget of nearly \$230 million for the Shalamcheh-Basra railway and this is happening for a first time," Safari said.

The comments came a day after Iraq's transportation minister Razzaq Muhibis Al-Saadawi paid a short visit to Tehran to finalize a series of bilateral agreements and projects, including the cross-border railway project.

Iran's transportation minister

Mehrdad Bazrpash said that a first phase of construction works for Shalamcheh-Basra railway will involve demining operations on lands in border regions that have remained inaccessible since the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

Bazrpash said Iranian companies will then start building an 880-meter modern bridge on the Shatt al Arab River in Iraq while launching track-laying works at the same time.

He said the entire project is expected to take 18 months, adding that Iran and Iraq will be able to extend the timing based on recent agreements reached between the two countries.

Experts say the launch of Shalamcheh-Basra rail link will lead to a major increase in trade and religious tourism between Iran and Iraq.

The project will also give Iran railway access to Syria and Jordan through the Iraqi territory while enabling Iraq to take deliv-

ery of cargo via Iran's large rail network from other countries.

Shalamcheh-Basra Railway to Connect Iran to Jordan, Syria

Iranian Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development for Transportation Affairs Shahrar Afandizadeh said that with the launch of Shalamcheh-Basra Railway, Iran will be connected to countries like Jordan, Syria and other neighboring countries in addition to Iraq.

Afandizadeh highlighted the significance of trade and economic relations between Iran and Iraq, and said five provinces of Iran and Iraq share a border and Shalamcheh is the most important border crossing.

For many years, efforts have been made to connect the rail network from Shalamcheh to Basra, according to which, Iran can connect its railway to the holy city of Karbala, he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Afandizadeh pointed to the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Iraqi officials and added that the construction operation of the Shalamcheh-Basra Railway project would be terminated within one and a half years.

This railway will be 32 kilometers long and when it is launched, Iran's railway network will be connected to Jordan, Syria, and also other neighboring states.

S&P Global: U.S. Corporate Bankruptcy Filings Spiked in March

WASHINGTON (Fox Business) - Corporate bankruptcy petitions in the U.S. surged last month and first-quarter filings this year reached the highest level since 2010, according to new data.

S&P Global Market Intelligence reported that it recorded 71 corporate bankruptcies in March, marking the fourth straight month of increases and the highest monthly tally since July 2020.

In the first three months of 2023, 183 major companies announced bankruptcies, S&P Global said, which is the greatest total for the period in the past dozen years.

The analysts included both public and private firms with public debt that had at least \$2 million in assets or liabilities at the time of filing, as well as private companies reporting at least \$10 million in assets or liabilities.

The sectors hardest hit so far this year have been consumer discretionary with 23 filings, followed by financials and health care, both with 14 bankruptcies, according to the data.

"It is clear that the rise in bank-



ruptcies is a product of weaker consumer spending due to inflation as well as rapidly rising interest rates," Adam Kobeissi, founder of global markets publication The Kobeissi Letter, told FOX Business. "Over 20% of bankruptcies have been in consumer discretionary and consumer staples companies, both sectors that are highly prone to high inflation."

Another 13 companies filed in the industrials sector, and eight filed both in the energy and information technology segments.

Several prominent firms went under or sought protection to reorganize in March, most notably Silicon Valley Bank, which filed for Chapter 11 one week after being shut down by authorities amid a run on the bank on March 10.

SVB is so far the largest bankruptcy of 2023, followed by Sinclair Broadcasting Group's regional sports business Diamond Sports Group, Avaya Inc., Serta Simmons Bedding and Party City - all of which listed liabilities in the billions of dollars.

China-U.S. Rift Threatens Global Growth - IMF

WASHINGTON (Bloomberg) - Intensifying geopolitical tensions could disrupt overseas investment and eventually lead to a protracted loss of 2% of the world's gross domestic product, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned.

According to the organization's economic outlook, fragmentation risks are rising globally as companies and policymakers are oriented towards moving production home or to "trusted countries."

Growing trade tensions between investing and recipient countries like the United States and China have reduced the overall bilateral cross-border allocation of portfolio investment and bank claims by around 15%, the IMF said.

"Over the last decade, the share of FDI (foreign direct investment) flows among geopolitically aligned economies has kept rising, more than the share for countries that are closer geographically, suggesting that geopolitical preferences



increasingly drive the geographic footprint of FDI," the report noted. The rise of "friendshoring" could hurt less-developed markets the most, the organization suggested.

"Emerging markets and developing economies are particularly affected by reduced access to investment from advanced economies, due to reduced capital formation and productivity gains from the transfer of better technologies and know-how," it said.

IMF economists cautioned that "a fragmented world is likely to be a poorer one."

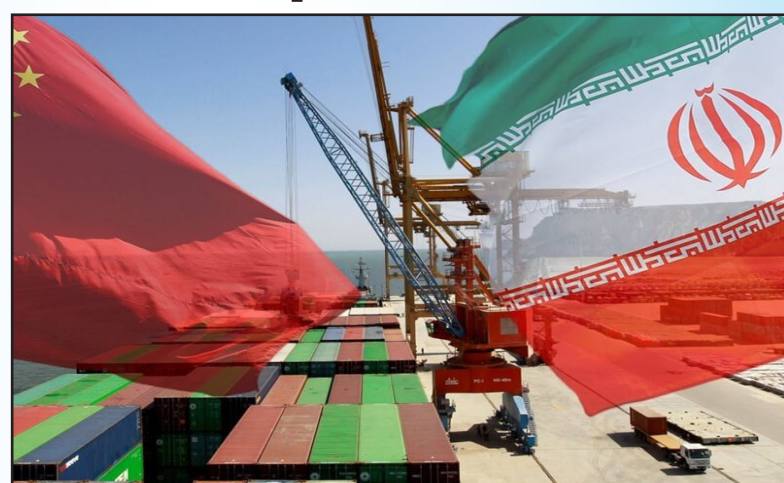
While reconfigured supply chains could potentially strengthen national security and help maintain a technological advantage over geopolitical rivals, "reshoring or friendshoring to existing partners will often reduce diversification" and make countries more vulnerable to macroeconomic shocks, the report said.

China Destination of 31% of Iran's Non-Oil Exports

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce Majid Reza Hariri has said that thirty-one percent of Iran's non-oil exports are destined for China, adding that giant steps have been taken in the current year for the expansion of trade relations between the two countries.

Major parts of the Iran-China 25-Year Strategic Partnership Document will be implemented in the current Iranian calendar year of 1402 (started March 21, 2023), Hariri said, noting that trade delegations of the two countries will officially strengthen their cooperation after the holy month of Ramadan.

He went on to say that Iran and China have always had amicable relations with each other since many years ago.



China is the first country that retained its friendly ties with Iran despite sanctions imposed by the Western countries against the Islamic Republic, he stated.

Chinese companies are eagerly interested in expanding relations with Iran as well, Hariri emphasized.

According to the statistics of China's Customs, trade exchanges of this country with Iran that were about \$14.760 billion in 2021 reached \$15.795 billion in 2022, showing a seven percent growth.

Croatia, Iran to Form Joint Chamber of Commerce

TEHRAN, - The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Zagreb Parviz Esmaili has reviewed the latest state of trade between the two countries in a meeting with the president of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce.

In the meeting between Esmaili and Luka Burilovich, the two sides expressed their satisfaction with the three-fold increase in non-oil trade

between the two countries over the past three years.

Also, the two sides agreed to support the development of relations between private sector companies as well as the establishment of a joint chamber of commerce between Iran and Croatia in the near future.

Other issues raised in this meeting were examining opportunities for cooperation

in general industrial fields and knowledge-based products, as well as ways to facilitate and adjust tariffs in the transportation of goods between the two countries.

The ambassador of Iran and the president of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce agreed that experts from both sides will discuss the implementation of joint projects.

Oil Prices Set to Extend Gains for a Third Consecutive Week

NEW YORK (Oil Price) - Crude oil prices are about to post a third weekly gain boosted by OPEC+'s unexpected decision to reduce its unexported output by another 1.16 million bpd, despite continued concern about a global slowdown.

Oil prices surged on Monday, following the Sunday declaration of the oil production group and later in the week steadied amid fresh U.S. and Chinese economic data that suggested weaker post-pandemic growth.

In the U.S., the latest weekly jobless data revision showed a higher number of initial jobless claims than previously estimated and growth in the service sector disappointed. In China, the Caixin PMI reading for March suggested a deceleration of post-pandemic growth.

These negative developments served to put a cap on oil prices and after Monday, prices were little changed, despite additional support from yet another U.S. invento-

ry draw as estimated by the Energy Information Administration.

Bloomberg noted that oil has gained some 26% since its mid-March trough, prompted by the string of bank collapses, with Brent crude above \$85 and West Texas Intermediate topping \$80 per barrel.

"The oil market's bullish momentum may have paused, but upside potential remains given the tightening supply backdrop," PVM broker Stephen Brennock told Reuters.

Official: Annual Exports Top \$52.5bn

TEHRAN - Iran's deputy minister of industry, mine and trade for general industries affairs Muhammad Mehdi Baradaran has put the value of the country's total exports in the Persian calendar year of 1401 (March 2022-March 2023) at \$52.5 billion.

Baradaran also put the exports value of the country a year earlier at \$37.5 billion.

Speaking in the honoring ceremony of the exemplary exporters of Khorasan Razavi province on Thursday, Baradaran

stated that interacting with various countries of the world, especially neighboring countries, is a top priority of the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi.

He pointed to the restoration of diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia after seven years and added that as soon as the political relations between the two countries were resumed, the Saudi Arabian traders called on Iranian counterparts to export the first cargo

of food to the Arab country in line with reactivating the trade exchanges between the two countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy industry minister pointed to the upcoming visit by Raisi to Indonesia and said, "With the coordination made in this regard, giant steps would be taken in line with implementing the preferential tariffs in order to carry out imports and exports to this Muslim country with the least possible tariff rates."