

# Minister: Connecting Electricity Grids of Iran, Turkey, EU Possible



TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Energy Ali Akbar Mehrabian on Monday announced the possibility of electricity connection between Iran and Turkey and also the European Union (EU) via Turkey.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the 19th Iran Interna-

tional Water Industry Exhibition & 13th International Renewable Energies Exhibition, Mehrabian added that the necessary power transmission lines have been constructed between Iran and Turkey.

He further emphasized that pro-

ducers of renewable power can embark on exporting electricity overseas without any restrictions.

The possibility has been provided to export electricity to neighboring Turkey and then to Europe via this country, Mehrabian added, IRNA reported.

As the largest industrial and commercial event in Iran, the international exhibition of Iran's water industry and water and sewage facilities is held annually with the participation of capable domestic and foreign companies in the field of water and sewage industry.

They showcase their latest achievements and products to the professionals and specialists of the industry and guide their future activities and innovations by considering the trend of market demand and the direction of growth of this industry.

## SAIPA Reports Decline in Output

TEHRAN— The latest data related to the production of automobiles in Iran shows that SAIPA, the second-largest carmaker in the country, saw a decrease in its output in the nine months to late December.

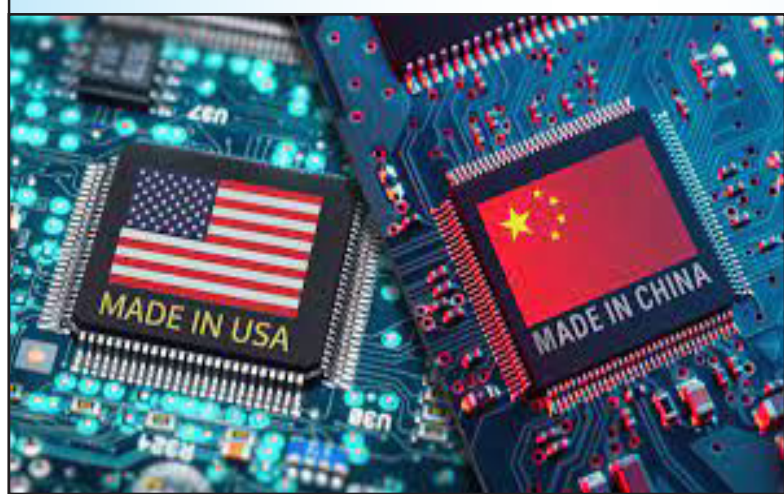
SAIPA produced a total of 225,380 cars in Iran from March 21 to December 21, 2022.

The figure is a 3.5% drop from 217,524 cars in the same period last year.

A report by the Iranian exchange

organization shows that Saipa's combined output of cars and pickup trucks would reach nearly 420,000 units in the year to late March, down by nearly a half from the company's own annual production estimates.

## China Buys Near-Record \$40bn of Chip Gear to Beat U.S. Curbs



LONDON (Bloomberg) -- China's imports of chipmaking machines jumped last year as firms ramped up investment in an attempt to get around U.S.-led efforts to hobble the nation's semiconductor industry.

Imports of the machinery used to make computer chips rose 14% in 2023 to almost \$40 billion — the second largest amount by value on record in data going back to 2015, according to Bloomberg calculations based on official customs data. The increase came

despite a 5.5% drop in total imports last year, underscoring the importance that the Chinese government and the nation's chip industry have placed on becoming self-sufficient.

Chinese chip companies are rapidly investing in new semiconductor factories to try and advance the nation's capabilities and get around export controls imposed by the U.S. and its allies. Those curbs are making it harder for Chinese companies to get ac-

cess to the machines needed to make the most powerful chips — and slowing the development of China's high-tech sector, which is seen as a threat to the U.S.

China's imports from the Netherlands soared last year ahead of new export controls, which will further limit the ability of companies such as Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp. to get the latest machinery.

In December, imports of lithography equipment from the Netherlands jumped almost 1,000% from a year earlier to \$1.1 billion as firms rushed to buy ahead of the start of Dutch restrictions this month.

Even before those curbs came into effect, Dutch company ASML Holding NV had canceled shipments of some of its top-of-the-line machines to China at the request of the U.S. government, Bloomberg reported earlier this month. The cancellations came weeks before export bans on the high-end chipmaking equipment came into effect.

## Iran, Cuba Keen to Boost Cooperation in ICT

TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology (ICT) Issa Zarepour in a meeting with First Deputy Minister of Communications of Cuba Wilfredo González Vidal stressed the readiness of Iranian ICT firms to participate in the IT market of Cuba.

The two sides emphasized enhancing cooperation in the field of Communications and Information Technology (ICT).

Zarepour noted that Iran is willing to share its experiences and know-how with the Latin American country in the fields of developing communication infrastructures, promoting electronic government (e-government) and launching mega data centers.

He pointed to the significance of the development of relations with Cuba and said Tehran and Havana share commonalities that can be used to broaden ties in all areas, especially in the field of communications and information technology.

He also referred to the unilateral U.S. sanctions imposed against the two countries and



said these sanctions have created opportunities for the Iranian companies to increase their indigenous knowledge and know-how, IRNA reported.

Turning to the high capabilities and potentials of Iranian companies in different ICT sectors, the minister pointed out that Iranian ICT companies are ready to cooperate with Cuba in various fields such as the development of the communications infrastructures, launch of various platforms, implementation of the optical fiber project and helping Cuba enhance its communications network from 2nd and 3rd generations to 4th generation.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Zarepour referred to the fruitful experiences of Iran in the field of e-government and said it can share its experiences with the Cuban government in this regard.

The first deputy minister of communications of Cuba, for his part, said his country attaches great importance to its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Since Iran has good experiences in the ICT field, Cuba is interested in enhancing cooperation with Iranian firms for the development of its ICT infrastructures, Wilfredo González Vidal added.

## Nearly 50,000 UK Businesses on 'Brink of Collapse', Warn Insolvency Experts



LONDON (The Guardian) - Nearly 50,000 companies were in critical financial distress at the end of last year, a closely-watched report found, as business grappled with higher interest rates and the end of "cheap money".

Some 47,477 firms were on the "edge of collapse" in the final three months of last year, an increase of 25.9pc on the previous quarter, according to the lat-

est Red Flag Alert report from insolvency specialist Begbies Traynor.

The surge marked the second consecutive three-month period where critical financial distress has grown by about a quarter.

The report showed that all of the 22 sectors assessed saw an increase in critical financial distress, but the construction and real estate sectors were among

the hardest hit.

Julie Palmer, partner at Begbies Traynor, said: "After a difficult year for British businesses that was characterized by high interest rates, rampant inflation, weak consumer confidence and rising and unpredictable input costs, we are now seeing this perfect storm impacting every corner of the economy.

"Now that the era of cheap money is firmly a thing of the past, hundreds of thousands of businesses in the UK, who loaded up on affordable debt during those halcyon days, are now coming to terms with the added burden this will have on their finances."

She added: "Sadly, for tens of thousands of British businesses who should be looking ahead to 2024 with some degree of optimism, the new year will bring a fight for survival as the debt storm that has been brewing for years looks like it is breaking across the country."

## Beijing Sets 2024 Growth Target Higher Despite Slowing Economy

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's capital city Beijing has set a growth target of around 5% for 2024, surpassing last year's target of above 4.5%, despite expectations of slower growth for the national economy.

The economy of the capital city expanded 5.2% in 2023, in line with the national economy, which has so far posted feeble post-pandemic growth amid a deepening property crisis, mounting local government debt and persistent deflationary risks.

"The target of around 5% is

needed to stabilize expectations and boost confidence, to achieve important livelihood goals such as employment and household income," the Beijing Daily reported on Sunday, citing an unnamed government official.

"But a growth rate of around 5% is still very challenging, and achieving the goal requires arduous efforts," the official said.

Beijing aims to control its survey-based urban jobless rate below 5% this year.

China's 2023 economic growth, which was slightly

ahead of the annual target of around 5%, was partly helped by the previous year's low-base effect amid COVID-19 lockdowns.

Chinese leaders have made boosting confidence in the economy a top policy priority, as businesses and consumers are wary of job security, income growth and the housing market.

Beijing's growth target for 2024 "may serve as a precursor" to a more supportive national growth target, said Tommy Xie, head of Greater China Research at OCBC Bank.

## Oil Rises as Geopolitics Counter Demand Concerns

LONDON (Reuters) - Oil prices rose on Monday as traders weighed the impact of wars in the Middle East and Ukraine on oil supply against economic headwinds dampening global oil demand.

Brent crude rose 90 cents to \$79.46 a barrel by 1450 GMT.

The front-month U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures contract for February delivery was up \$1.10 at \$74.42 a barrel in tepid trade, with the contract set to expire on Monday. The more active March WTI contract was up 91 cents at \$74.16.

"While oil prices have firmed up a little, it is strange that they have not risen further, given the rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East," said Gary Dugan, chief investment officer at Dalma Capital.

"Part of the reason why oil prices have remained in check could be the market's anticipation that global growth is slowing.

Russian energy company opens new tab Novatek has been forced to suspend some operations at its Baltic Sea fuel export terminal because of a fire, it said on Sunday, which Ukrainian media said was caused by a drone attack. The fire has been extinguished, local authorities said on Monday.

Oil fundamentals could continue to drag on prices, according to IG analyst Tony Sycamore.

Oil production is higher while the growth outlook in China and Europe is mixed and GDP data this week is expected to show growth of the U.S. economy has slowed considerably, he said.

"Investors want to be bullish, but tepid data and a cautious narrative from policymakers keep them on the back foot," said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM.

The latest demand growth forecasts by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the International Energy Agency and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries for 2024 are in a wide range between 1.24 million and 2.25 million barrels per day, though all three organizations expect demand growth to slow in 2025.

Separately, production at Libya's Sharara oilfield resumed on Sunday, state oil company NOC said, after protesters ended a sit-in that had halted output since early January.