

Report: Iran Raises Natural Gas Supply to Iraq by 3-4 Times



TEHRAN - Iranian exports of natural gas to Iraq increased significantly in April compared to earlier this year, according to regional oil and gas analytics firm.

In a report published on Saturday, the MEES quoted as saying a senior official in Iraq's Electricity Ministry that imports of gas from Iran for use in Iraqi power plants had reached an average of 30-40

million cubic meters per day per day in April.

Ali Ahmad, who leads Iraq's state electricity generation company, said that Iranian gas supplies to Iraq had increased by three to four times in April compared to early months of 2023.

The increased supply comes as Iraq is bracing for a hot summer when demand for cooling will reach

record highs across the country.

Iraq relies on Iran for a significant part of the gas supply it needs to run its power plant. The Arab country has received rounds of waivers from U.S. sanctions on Iran to be able to continue energy imports from its eastern neighbor.

Iranian gas supplies to Iraq dropped significantly in 2021 when the Arab country failed to pay its energy arrears to Tehran.

The supplies had remained at low levels until early this year when Iranian authorities announced that the Iraqis had found a way round the U.S. sanctions to pay for gas imports.

Senior Iraqi government officials have travelled to Iran in recent months to discuss increased energy cooperation between the two neighbors.

President Abdul Latif Rashid was in Tehran on Saturday for a first official visit since he took office in Baghdad in October.

Turkey-Iran Transactions Top \$1.3bn

TEHRAN - Iran and Turkey traded \$1.379 billion worth of goods in the first three months of 2023 to register a 14% year-on-year decrease.

The latest data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute show that the value of bilateral trade between Iran and Turkey stood at \$1.379 billion in the first three

months of 2023, down 14%, with Turkish exports at \$702 million, up 2%, and Iranian exports at \$677 million, registering a 27% decline.

The European Statistical Office (Eurostat) also reported exports of 1.567 billion cubic meters of Iranian gas to Turkey in the first three months of 2023, which shows a 17% decrease compared

with the same period of the year before.

Earlier, the spokesman for the Trade Promotion Commission of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade, Ruhollah Latifi said that China, Iraq, Turkey, the UAE, and India have been the top five destinations for the exports of Iran's goods over the last year.

China Factory Activity Unexpectedly Cools in April

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's manufacturing activity unexpectedly shrank in April, official data showed on Sunday, raising pressure on policymakers seeking to boost an economy struggling for a post-COVID lift-off amid subdued global demand and persistent property weakness.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) declined to 49.2 from 51.9 in March, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, below the 50-point mark that separates expansion and contraction in activity on a monthly basis.

That missed expectations of 51.4 tipped by economists in a Reuters poll and marked the first contraction since December, when the official manufacturing PMI was at 47.0.

The world's second-biggest economy grew faster than expected in the first quarter thanks to robust services consumption, but factory output has lagged amid weak global growth. Slowing prices and surging bank savings are raising doubts about demand.

The Politburo, a top decision-



A worker wearing a face mask works on a production line manufacturing bicycle steel rim at a factory, as the country is hit by the novel coronavirus outbreak, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, China March 2, 2020.

making body of the ruling Communist Party, on Friday stressed that restoring and expanding demand is the key to a durable recovery and cautioned the current improvement is mainly restorative "with weak momentum and insufficient demand".

"A lack of market demand and the high-base effect from the quick manufacturing recovery in the first quarter" were among factors that led to the contraction in

April, said senior NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe.

New export orders edged down to 47.6 from 50.4 in March, the PMI showed.

The manufacturing sector, which employs about 18% of China's workforce, remains under pressure due to slack global demand. Some exporters told Reuters at the country's biggest trade fair they have frozen investments and some have cut labour costs in response.

Russian Oil Still Powering EU

LONDON (Bloomberg) - The EU is still powering its economy with Russian oil despite sanctions as the member states are now said to be buying the sanctioned fuel through India.

In December, the EU, G7, and allied countries imposed an embargo and a \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian crude and later introduced similar restrictions for exports of petroleum products.

But India has not joined the ban and instead has ramped up purchases of Russian oil that Moscow has been offering at discounts.

In 2022-2023, Indian refiners bought between 970,000 and 981,000 barrels of Russian oil per day, accounting for more

than a fifth of the country's overall imports, which were between 4.5 million and 4.6 million barrels per day (bpd), Kpler and Vortexa data showed.

Not only has India become Russia's top oil buyer since the ban went into effect, New Delhi is now on track to become Europe's largest supplier of refined fuels. Indian processing plants have been snapping up cheap Russian oil, turning it into fuels and reselling it to the EU at a competitive price.

"Russian oil is finding its way back into Europe despite all the sanctioning and India ramping up fuel exports to the west is a good example of it," a lead crude analyst at Kpler, Viktor Katona,

told Bloomberg. "With India taking in so much Russian barrels, it's inevitable," he added.

Imports of fuel from India to the EU are set to jump above 360,000 bpd, overtaking shipments from Saudi Arabia, according to Kpler.

Diesel powers large sectors of the European economy with more than a third of it coming from Russia prior to the conflict in Ukraine. Now that the EU has stopped accepting refined products from Moscow, the bloc needs to source the fuel from alternative suppliers, which means higher shipping costs and tighter competition between refineries, the outlet said.

Envoy: Two Major Chinese Companies Plan to Invest in Khuzestan

TEHRAN - Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Chang Hua says two major Chinese companies plan to invest in Khuzestan, in Iran's oil-rich southwest.

During a meeting with Khuzestan's governor-general on Sunday, Hua said other Chinese companies could also come forward with any investment plans as related to the Iranian province.

He expressed hope that given the two countries' good relations and

Khuzestan's tourism capacities, a large number of tourists would travel to the Iranian province from China and visit its historical sites.

Hua emphasized the need to advertise the province's tourist spots to attract visitors.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Chinese ambassador said the boosting of the ties between Iran and China would lead to more Chinese companies entering the Iranian investment market.

This comes as Iran is under U.S. sanctions.

He said Beijing supported Iran's territorial integrity as strongly as it supported its own and backed "Iran against Western countries, which assail Iran's and China's interests under various pretexts."

He also said the reestablishment of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia last month — which came after Chinese mediation — was helpful to regional peace and development.

14th Iran Petrochemical Forum to Kick Off in Tehran



SHANA - The National Petrochemical Company (NPC) managing director Morteza Shahmirzaei on Sunday said the 14th Iran Petrochemical Forum (IPF) focusing on value chain and new opportunities will revolve around eight topics.

Shahmirzaei added the forum's subjects are "Feedstock, products and supply chain"; "Solutions and advanced optimization technologies"; "Integration and coordination between petrochemical and refining complexes"; "Production process and market"; "Methanol market and its roles";

"Global energy crisis and future of petrochemical industry"; "Investment and financial supply opportunities"; and "Energy optimization and production without pollution".

He also said workshops will be held to discuss "compounding and value chain", "applied project models in petrochemical industry", "petrochemical projects in Iran: challenges and opportunities", and "carbon management strategy for petrochemical industry".

The participants in the 14th edition of IPF, the NPC head continued, will also exchange views on "petrochemical

hubs and parks", "development projects and investment in these projects" and "exploiting modern technologies".

Shahmirzaei earlier said the forum will provide a "good opportunity" to acquire the world's modern technical know-how and indigenize technologies.

The NPC CEO made the remarks at the third session of the Executive Working Group on the 14th IPF and added the forum will help the petrochemical industry achieve its specified goals.

He put great emphasis on balanced development and continued, "Iran has manufactured a great number of petrochemical equipment and products and is moving on a path toward self-sufficiency, acquiring technical know-how, and producing catalysts by relying on its scientists and researchers' knowledge."

Shahmirzaei added, "We need to promote quality of petrochemical products and produce strategic products to meet the needs of midstream and downstream industries."

Tehran will host the 14th Iran Petrochemical Forum from May 1-2, in which experts and industrialists from more than 15 countries will take part.

Pakistan, Iran Discuss Ways to Boost Bilateral Trade Ties

TEHRAN - Iran's envoy to Pakistan Seyyed Muhammad Ali Hussein and the Pakistani Minister of Finance Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Sunday emphasized the need to take more effective steps to strengthen economic cooperation and help increase trade relations.

Appreciating the efforts of the Iranian ambassador during his diplomatic tenure in Pakistan in order to strengthen and consolidate brotherly relations between the two neighboring countries, Ishaq Dar praised the actions taken especially in the commercial and economic fields.

Expressing their satisfaction with the volume of trade between Iran and Pakistan, which has exceeded two billion dollars, the two sides emphasized the need to explore new ways to help increase the volume of trade and assist develop bilateral economic cooperation.

Emphasizing the country's economic outlook, Pakistan's finance minister expressed confidence that despite economic challenges, Pakistan is in the direction of progress and development.

Appreciating the cooperation and support of the Pakistani government for the development of bilateral rela-

tions in various fields, the Iranian ambassador stated that the potentials and capacities of Iran and Pakistan are the main factors for the expansion of joint cooperation.

Hussein added that the volume of bilateral trade between Iran and Pakistan has now reached \$2.4 billion, while also expressing his unhappiness with the low level of economic ties between the two nations as compared to the high level of political relations.

The Iranian diplomat urged for more efforts to support the business people of both countries.

Fitch Downgrades France's Credit Rating

PARIS (Le Monde) - Rating agency Fitch has downgraded France's sovereign credit rating, warning that public resistance to a recent pension reform could take a toll on the economy.

The agency lowered the rating from "AA" to "AA-", with a stable outlook. The downgrade means France is considered a more risky venture for investors, which could lead to higher borrowing costs.

"Fitch believes that social and political pressures illustrated by the protests against the pension reform will complicate fiscal consolidation," the agency wrote. It added that the government's decision to bypass a parliamentary vote to push through the pension reform will "likely further strengthen radical and anti-establishment forces."

"Political deadlock and (sometimes violent) social movements pose a risk to Macron's reform agenda and could create pressures for a more expansionary fiscal policy or a reversal of previous reforms," Fitch warned.

French President Emmanuel Macron



Fitch cites civil unrest in downgrade of France's credit rating

signed the unpopular pension reform into law in mid-April, despite months of nationwide protests and resistance in parliament. The measure raised the retirement age from 62 to 64. Following its enactment, the political opposition and unions vowed to continue contesting the move. Analysts have warned that as the presi-

dent's party does not have a parliamentary majority, it may be difficult for it to deliver on other reforms due to the public unrest.

French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire, however, pledged that Paris will continue structural reforms despite Fitch's warnings.