

Tehran-Baku nine-month exchange of goods via rail up 33%:

Official



The director general of Iran's North Railway Administration-2 said that the exchange of goods between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan registered a 33-percent growth in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023).

While expounding on the nine months' performance of imports, exports and the transit of cargo at the Astara Border Terminal, Gholam Hossein Valadi said the exchange of non-oil products via rail between Tehran and Baku increased 33% from March 21 to December 22, 2023 compared to the same period last year, reported Tasnim News Agency.

About 498,000 tons of goods were exchanged between the two countries at the Astara Border Terminal, he noted.

Valadi put the weight of products exchanged between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan from March 21 to December 22, 2022 at 374,454 tons.

The official went on to say that 152,268 tons of non-oil products were imported into the country from the Republic of Azerbaijan via rail in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, showing about a 63 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period, the website of Iran Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) reported.

More than 93,000 tons of goods had been imported into the country from the Republic of Azerbaijan from March 21 to December 22, 2022, he stated.

He further noted that more than 136,000 tons of goods were exported from the country via the Astara Border Terminal through the rail network between March 21 and December 22, 2023.

Cement, chemicals, tiles and food products were among the main products exported to the Republic of Azerbaijan via rail, Valadi added.

In return, wood, lumber, chemicals, grains, etc. were among the most important products imported from the Republic of Azerbaijan to the country, he added.



Iran's Navy seizes oil tanker in court-mandated retaliation

Seizure lifts crude prices



The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy announced the seizure of an American oil tanker by court order in the Sea of Oman on Thursday.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) identified the tanker Marshall Islands-flagged St. Nicholas, saying it was boarded at about 7:30 a.m. (0330 GMT) off Sohar in Oman and changed course towards Bandar-e-Jask in Iran, Press TV wrote.

A British maritime risk company, Ambrey, said the recently renamed tanker was previously prosecuted and fined for carrying Iranian oil, which was confiscated by US authorities.

"Iran has previously taken action against those it has accused of

cooperating with the US," it added.

The vessel had been loaded with 145,000 tons of crude oil in Basra, Iraq, and was destined for Aliaga in Turkey, via the Suez Canal, said the tanker's Greece-based management company Empire Navigation.

The United States condemned what it called an "unlawful seizure" and demanded that Iran "immediately release the ship and its crew".

"No justification whatsoever to seize it, none whatsoever. They need to let it go," said Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House John Kirby.

"Following the violation of the Suez Rajan

in April and the theft of Iranian oil by the United States, the oil tanker re-named St. Nicholas was seized in retaliation this morning by court order and the approval of the Ports and Shipping Organization by the strategic Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and transferred to Iranian ports," Iran's Fars news agency reported.

The tanker, it said, had stolen the cargo of oil belonging to the Islamic Republic of Iran under the direction of the United States and transferred it to the country's ports and put it at the disposal of American authorities.

Oil prices gained about 1% on Thursday after Iran seized the oil tanker off the coast of Oman. Brent futures rose 61

cents, or 0.8%, to settle at \$77.41 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 65 cents, or 0.9%, to settle at \$72.02.

Last August, the US Navy unloaded a tanker of stolen Iranian oil worth around \$56 million off a Texas port, despite warnings from Iran and after American oil firms had resisted the temptation of touching the 800,000-barrel tanker for fear of Iranian retaliation in the Persian Gulf waters.

The decision came as Iran was marking the 70th anniversary of the CIA-engineered military coup against Iran's then-prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. The Marshall Islands-flagged Suez Rajan tanker carrying

Iranian oil was illegally seized by Washington in April 2023 under the guise of "a sanctions-enforcement operation" and guided toward the Texas port.

It came days after a group of US senators and House representatives, at the behest of the Israeli lobby in Washington, began mounting pressure on the Joe Biden administration to unload the tanker, without considering its possible repercussions.

It was not the first time the US had resorted to the unconventional step of seizing a sovereign country's cargo in international waters.

In May 2022, the US seized a Russia-operated ship, the Pegas, carrying Iranian oil off the

shore of Karystos near Greece to dispatch the oil cargo to the US, but the Greek court ruled against the move.

In February 2021, Washington seized a tanker carrying Iranian oil off the coast of the Emirati city of Fujairah and sold more than a million barrels of oil confiscated from it for \$110 million, or \$55 a barrel.

The United States has also regularly stolen Syrian oil in recent years under the guise of anti-terror operations in the Arab country. In August 2022, the Syrian Oil Ministry accused the US and its mercenaries of stealing 66,000 barrels of oil per day, accounting for almost 80 percent of the country's oil production.

Owji: \$20b investment in needed SP gas pressure boosting projects

Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji on Thursday stressed the need for investing \$20 billion in gas pressure boosting projects in the South Pars (SP) field.

Delivering a speech at the National Conference on Production Growth, Inflation Control with Governance Model and Roadmap for Having Knowledge-Based Big Industries by Taking Opportunities to Produce National Brands to Compete at Regional Level, the minister added, "To this end, there is a need to use domestic expertise and therefore 753 contracts were signed with knowledge-based companies involved in oil industry last year."

The number of domestic knowledge-based firms cooperating with the government stood at 150 when the 13th administration took over, but the figure has now risen to 650, he was quoted as saying by Shana.

Touching upon domestic oil industry's achievements, he said enemies failed to prevent its development in spite of sanctions, add-

ing, "Investment of around \$150 billion in the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (PSEEZ) in recent years and exports of technical and engineering services to other countries are among the major achievements."

Owji said the development process has taken place under all governments, but it has been fortunately accelerated under the 13th administration.

The country was faced with big challenges to oil exports in August 2021, when the 13th administration took office and sanctions were ramped up, recalled the minister, adding the challenges were beaten off and completion of 133 partly-finished key projects worth \$28.5 billion was put on the agenda, with the aim of increasing production. Elaborating on oil industry's achievements under the 13th administration, he said, "Oil production has jumped 60 percent, natural gas and gas condensate outputs have topped one billion cubic meters (bcm) and 760,000 barrels per

day, respectively, petrochemical production capacity has soared to 95 million tons per year, oil refining capacity has witnessed a 230,000-barrel increase per day by launching Phase 2 of the Abadan Refinery development plan, and gas processing capacity has increased by 50 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d) as part of a plan to boost production and processing capacities by putting the refinery of SP Phase 14 into operation."

He also referred to implementation of 50 new projects aimed at increasing output and creating added value in upstream and downstream sectors, underlining, "Around 2.2 million barrels will be added to the country's refining capacity when the new projects come on stream." Projects for promoting quality of products have started, said Owji, naming the project for improving quality of Isfahan Refinery's diesel by applying expertise of domestic knowledge-based companies and experts.



Shifting to the SP Phase 11 development project at the zero-border point, the oil minister said all operations were carried out by Iranian experts under the 13th administration. Five wells have become operational and 12-15 mcm/d have been added to the country's gas recovery capacity, explained Owji, stating the added figure will soar to 50 mcm/d when the operations of its wells are completed.

APG collection, economic growth
Approximately 11 mcm of

associated petroleum gas (APG) are now captured per day, said the oil minister.

The volume of APG to be gathered daily will reach around 17 mcm by the end of this winter and will jump to about 40 mcm by the end of the 13th administration's term (August 2025), he continued.

Talking about oil and gas industry's economic growth, Owji said, "According to the reports of the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) and the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the in-

dustry's economic growth surpassed 25 percent in summer 2023, which will, hopefully, not be less than 20 percent in the Iranian calendar year (ending March 19, 2024)." Predicting an annual eight percent growth in the country's Seventh Five-Year National Development Plan (2023-27), a roadmap for around 5.5-million-barrel-per-day output has been provided, he pointed out, and that participation of Iran's big contractors is required for achieving that goal.