

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tehran, Tashkent emphasize developing trade ties

Officials from Iran and Uzbekistan stressed the need to expand cooperation in the fields of trade, economy and energy.

Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Abbas Aliabadi and his accompanying delegation, during a visit to the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, held talks with the ministers of industry and energy of Uzbekistan to broaden bilateral ties in trade, economic and energy fields, reported Tasnim News Agency.

The two sides weighed plans for developing bilateral relations and discussed issues of mutual interest.

Head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Mahdi Zeyghami, Deputy Minister of Industry for transportation affairs Manouchehr Manteqi, Deputy Minister of Industry for equipment and machinery affairs Mohammad Mousavi, and Deputy Minister of Industry for mining and mineral processing affairs Reza Mohtashamipour accompanied Aliabadi on his visit to Uzbekistan. Meeting with Iranian businesspersons in Uzbekistan was also on the agenda of the Iranian delegation during the visit to the Central Asian country.

IRGC seizes foreign vessel carrying 'smuggled' fuel

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps seized Sunday a foreign oil tanker carrying around two million litres of "smuggled fuel" near the country's southern coast, local media reported.

"A foreign vessel with the flag of a country from Oceania was identified with two million litres of smuggled diesel," reported Tasnim News Agency.

The ship "was seized in accordance with a court order," the agency said, quoting IRGC commander Heydar Honaryan.

Fourteen crew members were also arrested, he noted, saying they were nationals of "two Asian countries", without specifying which.

Iran, a major oil producer, has among the cheapest petrol prices in the world, which encourages fuel trafficking. Iranian forces regularly target tankers illegally transporting fuel in the Persian Gulf.

Annual grain output up 3%

Grain production in Iran topped 23 million tons in 2023, registering a more than three-percent growth compared to a year earlier, according to the statistics of the US Department of Agriculture.

In a report on the situation of agricultural production in the world in 2023, the production of wheat in Iran was estimated at 14 million tons, showing a six-percent hike compared to a year before, reported Tasnim News Agency.

Iran had produced 800,000

tons of wheat in 2022, the department added.

According to the report, the total production of wheat in the world in 2023 stood at 785 million tons, registering a 0.5 percent decline compared to a year before. China was introduced as the largest producer of wheat in the world in 2023, producing 136 million tons, followed by the European Union and India.

Iran ranked 15th in the world in production of wheat.

"Barley" is another im-

portant grain produced in the country, the report said, adding that Iran produced three million tons of barley in 2023, showing no change compared to a year earlier.

Some 142 million tons of barley were produced in the world in 2023, showing a six percent slump compared to a year before.

In barley production, Iran stood in 10th place in 2023. The report added that about 4.5 million tons of other species of grain were produced in Iran in 2023.

65 tons of Iranian saffron smuggled in nine months

About 65 tons of saffron were smuggled from Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21-December 21, 2023), of which 90 percent were destined to Afghanistan as the remaining 10 percent were smuggled to Arab countries.

Announcing the above, Mohammadali Rezaei, the head of the Union of Exporters of Medicinal Plants, Food Products and Saffron of Iran added that

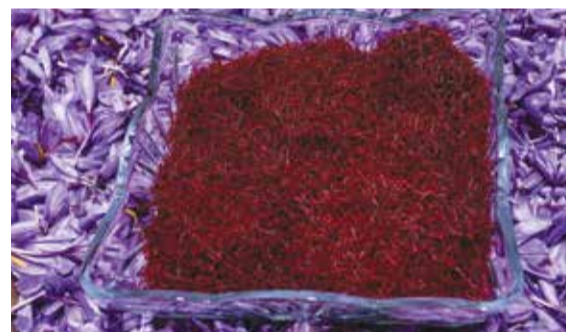
most of the saffron that is sold in the world markets as Spanish saffron goes from Iran to Spain in bulk, ILNA reported.

In the past years, Iran's annual production of saffron reached 500 tons, but in recent years this figure has decreased to 300 to 400 tons, he said.

"Afghanistan is a member of the World Trade Organization, and WTO member states are exempt from paying taxes in trade with

each other, as a result, saffron smuggled from Iran is sold under the Afghan

brand in global markets at lower prices." The saffron harvest this



[Iranian] year has decreased by 40 percent compared to last year, Rezaei said, explaining that the decrease was due to the increase in cultivation costs, climate tensions as well as water shortages in some areas. He put the annual consumption of saffron in Iran at 40 to 50 tons, noting that Iranian saffron enjoys higher quality compared to the products of other countries.

A total of 90 percent of the

saffron that is produced in the world is cultivated in Iran, but Iran's share of the global saffron market is 16 percent, Rezaei criticized, stating that the turnover of saffron market around the globe stands at about \$1.1 billion.

In addition to Iran, saffron is harvested in Afghanistan, Greece, Spain, China and Turkey, but Spain has the pole position in the global saffron market, he concluded.

Iran, Saudi Arabia to launch direct shipping line

Iran and Saudi Arabia plan to set up a direct shipping line between Kangan, in the southern Iranian province of Bushehr, and Dammam, in eastern Saudi Arabia, in a bid to boost trade between the two countries.

Governor of Bushehr Ahmad Mohammadzadeh said late on Saturday that the launch of the shipping line between Iran and Saudi Arabia was decided in a recent visit by Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari to the province as part of efforts to increase Iran's trade volume with countries in the Persian Gulf, IRNA reported. Mohammadzadeh also said that development projects introduced in Kangan are close to being finished, adding that large vessels can dock in the port in the near future.

Local officials consider the development of the maritime economy in Kangan to be important, he noted, adding that authorities plan to set up an industrial zone for knowledge-based companies in the region to serve the needs of the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries that exist in the port.

**Iran exports 10.5m tons of cement to 25 countries in nine months**

Iran exported 10.5 million tons of cement to 25 countries, including Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria, over the nine months, to November 21, 2023, an industry source announced.

Secretary of Iran's Cement Industry Producers Association Ali Akbar Alvandian said that some 60 million tons of cement were consumed domestically during the nine months, IRNA reported.

Alvandian said cement production in Iran rose in the nine months to late November thanks to stable supply of electricity and fuel to manufacturers, adding that the situation could further improve in the coming years.

He further noted that Iran was the fourth-largest cement producer in the world some two decades ago, when investment in the industry was at its highest. Iran produces some 90 million tons of cement per annum, Alvandian said, adding that production capacity is expected to increase by 8.8 million tons in the coming years with the launch of 13 projects.

**Tehran to host 21st WOODDEX expo**

The 21st Iran International Exhibition of Wood, Raw Materials, Accessories, and Fitting Machinery & Related Industries for Furniture, dubbed "WOODDEX Expo 2024," will be inaugurated in Tehran on Thursday.

The secretary of the Iranian Wood Industry Employers' Association said the exhibition's objective is to provide the participants and exhibitors with information on the latest developments in Iran's wood

industry, reported Tasnim News Agency. Speaking at a news conference held ahead of organizing the exhibition, Ali Moghanlou also said that \$80 million worth of various kinds of compressed

wood sheets was exported from the country last year. He stated that the production process of the wood industry in the country is on a growing path. The exhibition will run through February 4, 2024.