

Oil tanker seized by Iran bound for Oman: Report

A Chevron-chartered oil tanker seized by Iran more than a year ago was heading toward the Sohar port in Oman, LSEG ship tracking data showed on Friday.

On Thursday, ship tracking data showed the vessel moving to international waters, with the destination showing as Khor Fakkan in the United Arab Emirates, Reuters reported. The Marshall Islands-flagged Advantage Sweet was boarded by Iran's military in the Gulf of Oman in April 2023 after a collision with an Iranian boat.

Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) said in a statement on July 6, 2023 that the Richmond Voyager had ignored basic international maritime laws by escaping the scene of a collision with an Iranian vessel after an incident that happened in international waters in southern Iran a day earlier.

The statement said at the time that five people had been seriously injured in the collision between the Bahamas-flagged tanker and the Iranian ship which was carrying seven crew members when the incident took place. It added that the incident had caused flooding on board the Iranian vessel.

The US State Department welcomed reports that the vessel has been released, an agency spokesperson said. The State Department in March had called for the immediate release of the tanker.

There was no immediate comment from Chevron or Iranian officials on Thursday.

Iraqi FM, US official discuss Iran frozen assets

Iraq has urged the United States to promptly and fairly resolve the issue of Iran's frozen assets, Iraqi Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

During a meeting with the US' Acting Under Secretary for Political Affairs John Bass in Washington, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein emphasized the need for a quick and fair solution to Iran's frozen assets, Mehr news agency quoted the statement as saying. US sanctions have prevented Iran from accessing a huge amount of its assets in foreign banks.

Iran's frozen assets in Iraq amount to billions of dollars. The source made the statement at the time after media reports said Iran and the US had reached a prisoner swap deal that also included the release of Iranian funds held in South Korea.

Iraq has also released \$2.7 billion worth of Iranian funds in gas export money that the Baghdad government owes Tehran, an Iranian official announced last June.

Chairman of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Yahya Al-e Es'haq said at the time that a part of Iran's frozen assets in Iraq has been earmarked for the provision of funds needed by Iranian Hajj pilgrims.

Another portion has been used to pay for the provision of basic commodities, the senior Iranian trade official said at the time.

De-dollarization to lift US pressure off economies: Speaker

Iran-Russia cooperation to expand further: Putin



Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stressed that de-dollarization will lift the US pressure off emerging economies.

Addressing the 10th BRICS Parliamentary Forum in the Russian city of St. Petersburg, Qalibaf noted the national currencies swap agreement recently finalized by Tehran and Moscow has become an example of effective cooperation on the path to de-dollarization. "The recent financial agreement between Iran and Russia is a successful example of cooperation in the field of de-dollarization," Tass news agency quotes Qalibaf as saying. Last week, Mohammadreza Farzin, Central Bank of Iran

(CBI) Governor, announced that the swap agreement that enables Iran and Russia to trade in local currencies was finalized.

"The parliaments of the BRICS member states should make every effort to deepen cooperation in creating routes for money transfers and developing trade corridors for the exchange of goods and services between the BRICS countries," Qalibaf said. With de-dollarization being at the top of the agenda, the BRICS Parliamentary Forum kicked off on Thursday. Addressing the two-day event, Qalibaf also reiterated the Islamic Republic's support for a multilateral world system.

"The current world system has failed to take fruitful

measures in the field of solving regional and international disputes, putting an end to wars, conflicts and inequalities," he said.

Qalibaf noted that the Islamic Republic is keen to boost relations with BRICS member countries.

"Iran and its parliament understand that supporting and strengthening relations with BRICS member countries, including this grouping's development, is of paramount importance to them," he stressed.

Qalibaf also hailed the BRICS Parliamentary Forum as an opportunity to enhance cooperation between BRICS members to achieve common goals.

"The BRICS Parliamentary Forum is a very important instrument to develop in-

ternational relations, influence this world, and establish a new world order that would be more open, transparent and would result in more effective cooperation between our countries."

On the sideline of the international forum on Thursday, the Iranian parliament speaker had a meeting with Vladimir Putin, during which the Russian president highlighted his country's willingness for promotion of mutual cooperation with Iran.

Putin called for further expansion of bilateral relations between Moscow and Tehran in various spheres. The Russian president expressed satisfaction over Iran's accession to the BRICS group of emerging

economies, stating that his country had supported the Islamic Republic's membership.

Iran officially became a member of the BRICS at the beginning of this year, five months after it announced its acceptance as full member into the group along with Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

BRICS was formed by and initially consisted of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, which collectively represent around 40% of the global population and a quarter of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).

Iran was among dozens of countries that sought membership in BRICS and had submitted a for-

mal application to join the body.

Putin also hailed growing relations between Moscow and Tehran, stressing that their mutual cooperation will continue to develop under the upcoming Iranian administration led by president-elect Masoud Pezeshkian.

He also said that chairman of Russia's State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin will head a delegation to Iran to take part in Pezeshkian's swearing-in ceremony, which is set to take place on July 30.

Earlier, Qalibaf had a meeting with Volodin and two sides exchanged viewpoints on a host of issues regarding mutual ties as well as regional and international developments.

Sweltering heat forces closure of govt. offices in 15 Iranian provinces



Government offices in 15 provinces out of 31 across Iran were shut on Thursday amid a heatwave that stoked electricity consumption.

The provinces of Alborz, Qazvin, Semnan, Zanjan, Khuzestan, Qom, Bushehr, Markazi, Isfahan, Yazd, Sistan and Baluchestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kerman, South Khorasan and Lorestan were declared shut due to what ISNA described as an "imbalance in electricity production and consumption, as well as rising temperatures and record high usage."

Electricity demand in Iran has surged past 77,000 megawatts, and with temperatures expected to soar further, consumption is likely to continue its upward

trend.

In order to prevent widespread blackouts and planned power cuts in those provinces, Thursday was declared holiday so that "by reducing electricity consumption in offices, the national power grid can be managed and blackouts can be avoided," ISNA wrote.

Electricity shortfall has reached from the warning stage in the media texting messages to citizens.

Tavanir, the state-owned power generation, transmission, and distribution company, has sent out a nationwide warning SMS to subscribers, and on Wednesday, a consumption alert was also issued for Tehran.

In recent days, there have been grievances on social

media about power outages in various Iranian cities, which have disrupted the daily lives of citizens.

Consecutive blackouts in recent days, coupled with Tavanir's warning messages, indicate that a "regular but unannounced" blackout has taken hold in major cities. The power outages come despite assurances last week from Homayoun Haeri, the deputy energy minister for electricity and energy, who stated, "Thanks to the measures and planning that have been carried out, and with the cooperation of electricity industry subscribers, we will not have blackouts this year."

Meanwhile, Iranian media reports indicate that power cuts in some central parts of Tehran have lasted up to four hours. On Wednesday, Tehran's Power Distribution Company issued a notice to domestic consumers and said, "Following an unprecedented rise in temperatures, electricity consumption in the country has skyrocket-

ed, approaching warning levels."

The company further called on subscribers to be "more sensitive" to consumption management issues and contribute to optimizing electricity consumption by implementing simple solutions such as avoiding the simultaneous use of high-consumption appliances such as irons and vacuum cleaners during peak hours (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and setting air conditioners to the comfort temperature of 24 degrees Celsius.

In recent years, power outages in Iran have become a major issue, particularly during the hot summer months. In the past, the longest outages typically lasted for about two hours, but this year, they have hit four hours, marking the first time that residents have experienced such prolonged disruptions.

The impact of outages on local industries has been substantial, leading to a growing number of complaints from business and industry owners.

Will Pezeshkian succeed?

That said, this is no cakewalk for him or his government.

Page 1 > Past experiences indicate that concerns over emerging disagreements and pushback against Pezeshkian's domestic and foreign policy initiatives are not unfounded. As such, crossing one's fingers for successful implementation of his programs might be a bit too optimistic.

Despite the challenges, several factors make optimism about the president-elect's success more than just wishful thinking. These factors stem from the experiences that various political factions have gone through over the past decades. One of them is the unmet demands of the people, which past governments failed to address, leading to widespread dissatisfaction. Voter turnout below 50% in the 2021 presidential election, parliamentary elections in March, and the first round of the recent presidential election speaks volumes about this discontent.

If not for Pezeshkian's programs and promises of change, it's conceivable that even more voters would have thrown in the

towel this time. Now, the fact that voter turnout has hit 50% has relieved not only Pezeshkian but his defeated rivals, too, all of whom now hope to patch things up between the people and the government and drive up turnout in future elections.

Consequently, the failure of Pezeshkian and his government to deliver on their promises, especially on the economy and increased civil liberties, won't just fall on his shoulders or those of the reformists alone. Instead, the fallout will affect all entities and branches of power, further widening the chasm between the people and their leaders.

It's reasonable to expect, then, that all power players committed to bolstering the Islamic Establishment and improving living conditions will draw from past confrontational policies and rally behind the new government, setting aside differences for the common good. Naturally, such national cooperation demands the new government reciprocate by engaging constructively with its rivals and striking a moderate, inclusive tone. Pezeshkian's political track record shows he is, at heart, a moderate reformist.