

News in Brief

30 Countries at Oil Exhibit

The inauguration ceremony of 13th International Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Exhibition will be held on Wednesday with the participation of high-ranking officials and professionals in the field.

According to PIN, more than 1,360 domestic and foreign companies will take part in the event which coincides this year with the centenary of Iran's oil industry. The five-day exhibition is to be held at Tehran's International Fairground.

The event covers 10 task forces including consultant engineer groups, spare parts constructors, technical and commercial service provider companies, oil products producers, processing equipment producers, fuel consumption efficiency companies and research and training sector, general contractors, companies active in information technology fields.

Foreign companies from 30 countries including Germany, Britain, France, Russia, Ukraine, China, Spain, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, United Arab Emirates, Belgium, Sweden, Italy, Japan, Poland, South Korea, Romania, Netherlands, Belarus, India, Qatar, Turkey, Bahrain, UK, Japan, Finland, Denmark, Greece, Canada, USA and Hong Kong have confirmed their participation in the exhibition.

Iranian and foreign reporters and correspondents will cover the event.

Riyadh Keen on Closer Trade, Economic Ties

Saudi Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdallah bin Zainal called for further expansion of trade and economic ties with Iran, IRNA wrote.

In a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Riyadh Mohammad Hosseini, he referred to Iran's great economic and industrial potentials and termed the country's economy as growing.

Expansion of economic relations would lead to further boosting of all-out ties between the two Muslim states, the Saudi minister pointed out.

For his part, the Iranian envoy referred to the history of bilateral cooperation and briefed the Saudi minister on Iran's industrial and agricultural achievements in the past three decades following the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iranian products and goods are exported to Asian, African and even European states, he added.

Hosseini further voiced Iran's readiness to share valuable experience with Riyadh in various industrial and technical fields.

India Upbeat About Gas Pipeline

India is upbeat over resolving differences with Pakistan on a pipeline project to transfer Iran's gas to India and Pakistan.

"We have two-three small differences on transit fees. But I am very optimistic we can sort out the problems," India's Petroleum Minister Murli Deora said ahead of his next week's visit to Pakistan to discuss the Iran-Pakistan Iran (IPI) pipeline, PTI wrote.

"I had been getting invitations from the minister on when I would go to Islamabad, but I could not go there while elections were there or after the tragic events (assassination of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto)," he added.

Deora will hold talks with his Pakistani counterpart on the multi-billion-dollar project on April 23 in Islamabad. He had earlier said that there would be a meeting among representatives of India, Iran and Pakistan on the gas project, also known as the Peace Pipeline, on April 23.

The countries held tripartite talks on the project until recently, but New Delhi's vacillation made Tehran and Islamabad determined to continue talks bilaterally. Iran and Pakistan have almost finalized the deal.

Capital Market Growth Expected

Important developments such as economic growth and higher oil revenues, pricing reforms, increase in the productivity, stagnation in the housing market as well as reduced international pressures will result in the growth of the financial market in the year to March 2009.

Stating the above to ISNA, Nasrollah Barzani, deputy head of Bourse Organization, said conditions have been created for the financial market growth, adding that such a growth will be sustainable. He said last year's GDP reached well over 6.5 percent, paving the way for financial market stability and growth. "Capital market growth will reach \$100 billion having major impacts on the national economy."

According to Barzani, pricing reforms and the increase in the productivity rate will also benefit the capital market to a great extent throughout this year. "Modernization of technology at the bourse, transparent and reliable transactions, updated data on companies and shares for investors as well as investment security are among the main programs of the Bourse Organization in the current year (to March)."

Iran, Russia
New Energy Partners

By Masoud Safa



Gazprom has voiced interest in developing upstream and downstream sectors of Iran's energy industry and implement liquefied natural gas projects.

Russia wants to maintain its share in European energy supply and for this reason it is trying hard to prevent the entry of rivals in the market. However, in the past two years or so, the situation has changed.

When a dispute over Russia's supply of natural gas to Ukraine surfaced in 2006 over Kiev's refusal to pay higher prices demanded by Moscow, Europe shivered. Later when the gas giant Gazprom cut off the flow, Ukraine responded by funneling off its required amount from the transit pipeline to western Europe. Throughout central Europe, energy providers registered a drop in pressure and consumers worried the supply was in danger of being disrupted.

A gas war—or at least a war of words and threats—erupted as politicians in Germany and elsewhere began to question dependency on Russia for a steady supply of gas. Some pointed to alternative sources of energy, while others recommended a return to nuclear energy.

The dispute is compelling European governments to face up to the dangers of tying energy policy to foreign policy. As a result, Europe is no longer sure about energy flow from Russia.

As world's second biggest holder of gas re-

serves and one of the powerful members of OPEC, Iran can be a safer option for supplying Europe with energy.

Last year, Iran proposed that gas exporting countries set up an organization identical to OPEC to regulate gas prices and major energy flows in the interest of global stability.

For the time being, the Russian government has not responded to the latest Iranian proposal, which is understandable. Any clear-cut answer from the Kremlin is bound to directly influence global geopolitical alignment of forces, something it does not seem to be ready for.

However, early this week, Iranian and Russian officials met to discuss the expansion of ties in the energy sector. Russia's Gazprom officials will visit Iran next month to finalize a gas deal.

The two sides will also hold talks on a number of issues, including the development of three phases of South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf. In a February meeting in Tehran, the Russian energy giant and the National Iranian Gas Company reached an agreement to set up a joint company to implement energy projects.

At the meeting, Gazprom had voiced interest in developing upstream and downstream sectors

of Iran's energy industry and implement liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects.

Experts contend that Russia wants to purchase Iran's gas and reexport it to Europe via a pipeline through Bulgaria. Thus it can avoid likely disputes with countries such as Ukraine and Belarus over transit fees.

Given that Russia and Iran hold the world's biggest reserves of gas, it is only rational for analysts to be sensitive about the latest developments and talks between Tehran and Moscow. Also, Europe and the United States will hardly be pleased about this.

All things considered, Iran is, nevertheless, willing to export gas to Europe. To start with, the country has inked energy agreements with Austria and Switzerland and also aims to include Russian companies in these lucrative deals.

On the other hand, Moscow is interested in once again taking part in joint development projects in Iranian oil and gas sectors. This way it can make optimum use of its investment capacities and stay in the energy race beside Iran for a long time. In short, Iran and Russia are set to become the main players of world gas market in the near future.

Insurance for All

All Iranian workers now have insurance cover.

Stating the above to MNA, director of revenues at the Social Security Organization of Iran (SSOI), Qodratollah Qodsi, said that based on the latest figures, all workers in large and small factories and production units are now covered by insurance. "Even those working in small workshops with less than five workers are also covered."

He rejected claims that the SSOI is not prosecuting workshops which fail to provide insurance for their workers. The organization routinely inspects all small workshops and those who have not insured their staff yet should do so at the earliest, he stressed.

He asked workers who claim they are not insured to step forward and report their situation to the organization to resolve their situation. "Unfortunately, some laborers who do not have insurance refuse to report their situation to the organization for fear of being fired from their workplace.

"However, they can complain without mentioning their names so that something can be done about it," he concluded.



E. Azarbaijan Carpet Exports at \$200m

East Azarbaijan province exported \$200 million worth of carpets in the Iranian year to March 19, the provincial Commerce Department announced on Monday.

Director of the Commerce Department Sadeq Najafi said that handwoven Persian carpets were exported to the United States, Japan, the Persian Gulf states, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and a number of European countries, IRNA reported.

Holding Specialized Persian Carpet Exhibition in Denmark and studying the problems of carpet weavers were some of the measures taken by the department to upgrade the quality of handwoven Persian carpets, Najafi said.

There are almost 300,000 people in East Azarbaijan, northwest Iran, involved in weaving high quality Persian carpets and rugs.

