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## Iran-Russia trade rising despite external conditions: Moscow



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Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov said the trade turnover between Tehran and Moscow is rising despite the challenging external conditions.

The Russian official noted that the trade turnover increased to \$2b last year, TASS reported on Tuesday.

Trade relations between the two countries increased after anti-Iran sanctions were removed as a result of the 2015 nuclear agreement between Tehran and world powers.

However, the United States' unilateral pullout from the nuclear deal in 2018 and reimposition of sanctions against Iran have created obstacles in the way of expansion of trade ties between Iran and Russia.

Russia, as one of the signatories to the nuclear deal, has repeatedly denounced the US illegal sanctions against Iran and has tried to continue its economic relations with Tehran.

Morgulov said the two countries' trade turnover amounted to \$1.74b in 2018 and \$1.58b in the period between January and September 2019.

Agriculture products are the backbone of the trade between Tehran and Moscow. Trade turnover in the agriculture sector amounted to 1.28b in the period between January and September 2019, an increase of 41.6% year-on-year.

Russia's exports to Iran include machinery, steel, wagons, wood, vegetable oil, corn, barley, red meat, and other goods, while its imports from Iran are mostly dairy products, vegetables, and fruits.

"We hope that the temporary agreement, which is aimed at creation of a free trade zone between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), will give an extra impetus to expansion of ties," Morgulov said.

adding that the agreement "was enforced last October."

After several years of negotiations, Iran and the EEU reached a free trade agreement in early 2019, which came into force in late October.

Based on this agreement, about 840 commodity items are subject to preferential tariffs, which means tariffs on some goods are reduced and for some commodities, tariffs are levied.

Iran is a very important market in the region and development of ties with this country is of high significance for the EEU members.

Signing the free trade agreement between Iran and this union has laid the ground for the expansion of trade ties between the two sides.

Iran said in February that its trade volume with the union surpassed \$1 billion since implementation of the agreement between the two sides.

## Iran open to talks, but won't succumb to pressure: AEOI chief

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran is open to talks on the country's nuclear program, but will not bow to pressure for its decisions.

Salehi made the remarks during a meeting with the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, in Vienna, Press TV reported.

"Relations with the IAEA are very good and based on mutual understanding, and as an international authority, this organization and its decisions should not be influenced by political inclinations," Salehi said.

In his meeting with Grossi, the AEOI chief



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also underlined, "Iran welcomes negotiation and logic, but will not make any decisions under pressure."

The IAEA head, for his part, praised Iran's cooperation with the international organization in various areas and demanded that the Islamic Republic continue constructive cooperation with the agency as in the past.

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## US to renew sanctions waiver on Iraq's imports of Iranian gas: Official

The United States will grant Iraq a 45-day extension to a waiver allowing Baghdad to continue importing Iranian gas despite American sanctions, an Iraqi official told AFP on Wednesday.

The US slapped tough sanctions on the Iranian energy sector in late 2018 and initially granted Iraq a 45-day waiver before repeatedly extending it for 90 or 120 days.

Iraq relies on gas and electricity imports from its neighbor Iran to supply about a third of its power grid, crippled by years of conflict and poor maintenance.

"The extension this time will be for just 45 days, with some strict conditions," the senior Iraqi official said.

The two countries were



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still in talks over what exactly those conditions were.

**US pressure on Iraq**

Washington has repeatedly insisted Iraq wean it-

self off Iran by partnering with American companies to capture natural gas to use for its power plants and to improve transmission of electricity into homes to reduce waste.

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## Sanders wins in New Hampshire as Biden crashes



GETTY IMAGES

Bernie Sanders won New Hampshire's high-stakes Democratic primary on Tuesday, according to US network projections, leaving rivals including party stalwart Joe Biden in his wake as he staked his claim to challenge President Donald Trump in November.

Sanders, the flag-bearer for the party's progressive wing, had 26 percent of votes with most of the count complete in the northeastern state, where he routed Hillary Clinton in 2016, AFP reported.

"Let me take this opportunity to thank the people of New Hampshire for a great victory tonight," Sanders told cheering supporters after NBC and ABC called the result in his favor.

"This victory here is the beginning of the end for Donald Trump," the senator from neighboring Vermont added as raised the roof with his rallying cry for fairer taxes and health care reform.

Indiana ex-mayor Pete Buttigieg finished in second place at 24 percent as he readied for the more difficult battlegrounds ahead.

"Now our campaign moves on to Nevada, to South Carolina, to communities across our country. And we will welcome new allies to our movement at every step," he said.

Midwestern moderate Amy Klobuchar maintained a late surge to place third on about 20 percent, while liberal Elizabeth Warren finished in fourth at about nine percent.

Trump weighed in, tweeting: "Bootedgedge (Buttigieg) is doing pretty well tonight. Giving Crazy Bernie a run for his money. Very interesting!" Trump tweeted.

After months atop the pack, Biden had already conceded he expected to do badly in New Hampshire, as he did a week earlier in Iowa - and the former vice president's worst fears were beginning to materialize as he languished in fifth with just over eight percent.

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## Drop in China virus cases raises hopes despite growing death toll

The number of new cases in China dropped for a second straight day in a virus outbreak that has infected about 45,000 people and killed more than 1,100, health officials said on Wednesday.

The number of new cases has trended down in the past week, raising hopes that the epidemic may be peaking, according to AP.

The National Health Commission said 2,015 new cases had been tallied on Tuesday, the second straight, daily decline and down from nearly 3,900 a week ago, Commission spokesman Mi Feng said the situation is still grim but "we have seen some positive changes."

Leading Chinese epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan told doctors

in Wuhan that while the rest of China may have turned the corner, more efforts are still needed to stop the spread of the virus in the city and the rest of Hubei Province, the hardest-hit area.

The total number of cases in mainland China reached 44,653 and the death toll hit 1,113. Two people have died elsewhere, one in Hong Kong and one in the Philippines.

A Chinese drug manufacturer announced it has begun producing a drug developed by US company Gilead Sciences Ltd. for possible use against the new virus.

While most of the in-



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AFP

fections have been in China, it has gradually rippled overseas. In Japan, 39 new cases were confirmed on a cruise ship quarantined at Yokohama, bringing the total to 174 on the Diamond Princess.

A Formula One race in Shanghai in April became the latest event canceled because of the virus. Organizers said they would consider holding it later in the year if the situation improves.

DBS told 300 employees to work from home after it learned that an employee had been infected by the virus. The Singapore bank said all staff on the same floor should do so as a precautionary measure. The city-state has 50 confirmed cases.

In China, state media said a large cluster of cases in a district of Tianjin, a port city southeast of Beijing, has been traced to a department store. One third of Tianjin's 104 confirmed cases are in Baodi district, where the store is located, Xinhua reported.

China is struggling to restart its economy after the annual Lunar New Year holiday was extended to try to curb the spread of the virus. Traffic remained light in

Beijing and many people were still working at home.

Chinese President Xi Jinping promised tax cuts and other aid to industry as the government tries to limit growing damage to the economy. The outbreak has become the latest political challenge for Xi and China's ruling Communist Party.

Xi's announcement of tax cuts came as companies face increasing losses due to the closure of factories, offices, shops and other businesses in the most sweeping anti-disease measures ever imposed.

The government needs to "maintain stable economic operation and social harmony," Xi said in comments broadcast on state television.