

Suez Canal setting new records, says Egypt in response to claims that maritime traffic is falling

Author:

Sat, 2022-03-12 19:31

CAIRO: Claims that maritime traffic in the Suez Canal has fallen in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have been rejected by the Egyptian government, which says the key trading link is setting new records.

The government's media center said that it had contacted the Suez Canal Authority, which described the claims on social media as rumors.

Navigation movement in the canal during February 2022 reached a new high in terms of ship transit rates and net tonnages, the authority said.

"A total of 1,713 ships crossed from both directions, with a net tonnage of 100.1 million tons, compared with the transit of 1,532 ships during February last year, with a total net tonnage of 97.6 million tons," the authority said.

It said that flexible marketing and pricing policies have encouraged new shipping lines to use the canal.

According to the government media center, the Suez Canal achieved record profits in 2021, with revenue totalling \$6.3 billion, despite the effects of the pandemic on the global economy.

Performance rates in February this year are the highest for the month in the history of the canal, with revenue rising by 15.1 percent to \$545.5 million, not including navigation services. This compares with \$474.1 million for the same month last year.

Transit rates of various types of ships also rose compared with the same month last year, with bulk vessel numbers increasing by 29 percent, container ships by 11.8 percent and car carriers by 22.2 percent.



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Transit of wheat and gas ships surges 15%, head of the Suez Canal Authority says
Egypt raises Suez Canal's transit fees by 10%

[Turkey, Armenia vow to continue normalizing relations](#)

Author:

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Turkey and Armenia have pledged to pursue the normalization of ties in what the Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu described as a "productive and constructive" meeting on Saturday.

After talks with his Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, Cavusoglu said

that Azerbaijan also “supports the process” of normalization.

Armenia and Turkey have no diplomatic relations, a closed land border and a deep-seated hostility rooted in the mass killing of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

But in December, the two countries appointed special envoys to normalize relations, spurred by support from regional powerbroker Russia and Armenia’s arch-foe Azerbaijan.

The push came a year after Azerbaijan used the help of Turkish combat drones to recapture most of the territory it lost to ethnic Armenians in a 1990s war in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A Russian-brokered truce that ended the second conflict removed Turkey’s main objection to talking to Armenia – namely, Yerevan’s support for the local Nagorno-Karabakh government’s claim of independence from Azerbaijan.

The first commercial flights for two years resumed in early February between Turkey and Armenia, but the land border between the two countries has remained closed since 1993, forcing trucks to transit through Georgia or Iran.



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Gulf to play key role as EU plans to cut Russian gas imports, says envoy

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-11 21:46

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states will have an important role as the EU plans to cut Russian gas imports by two-thirds before the end of the year, said the EU ambassador to the Kingdom.

Speaking to reporters in Riyadh, Patrick Simonnet said that the EU has proposed a new plan to reduce its dependence on Russian energy amid Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states would play a key role as energy partners.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, has proposed to reduce its purchases of Russian gas by two-thirds by the end of the year, and cease buying fossil fuels from Russia before 2030.

In a reply to Arab News, the envoy said that this would be achieved by diversifying suppliers, which includes energy partners in the Gulf, and by increasing renewable hydrogen production and improving energy efficiency in households.

The EU seeks to increase imports of green hydrogen from Saudi Arabia, which is one of the largest producers in the world, he said.

Saudi Arabia aims to produce 4 million tons of hydrogen by 2030.

The EU envoy said: "There are discussions and negotiations to import natural gas from the Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, which has entered into the gas production strongly during the recent period and has launched many projects in this sector."

He said there is a new plan to change energy providers in general, especially renewable energy and hydrogen gas.

"We need to discuss with Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries how far we can redirect our gas imports," he said.

"The plan of Europe is also not only to continue importing gas from other sources but to invest in and import renewable energy."

During the press conference at the EU office in Riyadh, the envoy noted that the EU has a very close relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, stressing the need to further expand relationships in all fields and work to further enhance the partnership.

The envoy said that to enhance cooperation with the Gulf countries, a special cooperation strategy has been developed between the countries of the region that will enter into effective implementation at the beginning of January

2023, based on the recommendations of the meeting of foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries with their counterparts from the EU countries.

“Pillars have been laid in various sectors, most notably commercial investments, tourism and energy, achieving security and stability in the region, as well as offering solutions to climate change problems and supporting the initiatives put forward, foremost of which is the Middle East Green Initiative, which was proposed by Saudi Arabia.”

Simonnet noted that an important basis for further expanding close ties is the Saudi support for humanitarian relief, as the Kingdom represents a living and active example in this, especially in Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Commenting on the resumption of free trade negotiations between the EU and the Gulf states, he said: “There are great moves towards restarting negotiations in the near future, after studying technical issues that are being worked on, paving the way for the two parties to sit back at the negotiating table, after a ministerial meeting was recently held in Brussels on this issue.”

Without specifying a timeframe for the start of negotiations, the envoy affirmed that the two sides have a strong desire to resume free trade negotiations.

Citing the latest statistics, Simonnet said that the EU is Saudi Arabia’s one of the largest trading partners, with about €40 billion (\$44 billion) trade in 2020, stressing that European companies aspire to increase their investments in all diversified economic and commercial sectors.





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Russian gas transit via Ukraine returns to normal despite military hostilities Gasoline prices hit record as Biden announces US ban on Russian oil imports

[**CPJ urges Iran to free journalist seized at march in Tehran**](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-11 20:58

LONDON: The Committee to Protect Journalists has urged the Iranian authorities to free a journalist who was seized at an International Women's Day parade.

Amir-Abbas Azarmvand, a financial reporter for state-run economic newspaper SMT, had been arrested in September 2021 for allegedly "colluding against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the system," according to HRANA (Human Rights Activists News Agency) and CPJ's reporting from the time; he was released on bail on Sept. 23.

He was sentenced to four years and four months behind bars in January this year but was not summoned to jail, CPJ said, until suddenly being detained on Tuesday. He has now been sent to Evin Prison to begin the sentence.

"Iranian authorities must immediately release journalist Amir-Abbas Azarmvand and ensure that he does not face any further charges over his work," Sherif Mansour, Middle East and North Africa program coordinator at the CPJ, said.

"It is bad enough that Iran sentences journalists to years in prison over their reporting – it is even worse when those sentences hang over a journalist's head, to be enforced whenever authorities want to retaliate," Mansour said.

CPJ said: "Iranian authorities must release journalist Amir-Abbas Azarmvand from prison immediately and should cease jailing members of the press for their work."

Tehran has a long history of abusing journalists and other citizens who report on the regime and its activities – even for state media.

On its website, CPJ lists the newspapers shut down and the journalists jailed by the Islamic Republic as it seeks to exert control over the public sphere and discourse within it.



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[Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#)

Record number of journalists jailed in 2021: CPJ Turkish journalist convicted but freed over Erdogan insult

[Libya armed groups step back after Tripoli escalation](#)

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TRIPOLI: Libya's parliament-appointed prime minister said Friday that armed groups backing him had withdrawn from positions around Tripoli, after the UN

warned of a new escalation in the divided country.

Libya has had rival administrations since the eastern-based assembly swore in a prime minister earlier this month in a challenge to interim premier Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

Dbeibah has refused to hand over power to Fathi Bashagha, arguing that his own administration, installed last year under a United Nations-led peace process, has a mandate to rule until elections.

Pro-Bashagha forces had deployed on the eastern edges of Tripoli on Thursday, prompting the UN mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to warn against any escalation. But Bashagha's office said in a statement in the early hours of Friday that the groups had "opted not to use arms, and to return to their bases."

The groups had mobilized "to provide security, not to wage war," it said. Libya has been riven by conflict since the 2011 revolt that toppled dictator Muammar Qaddafi, and has had two rival governments before: from 2014 until Dbeibah was sworn in last year.

Washington's ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland, had also warned Thursday against spiralling tensions.

Late Thursday evening he said he had spoken to both Dbeibah and Bashagha, praising what he said were moves to resolve the standoff peacefully.

He commended Dbeibah's "commitment to protect lives" and Bashagha's "willingness to de-escalate tensions."

"Libya's stability and unity can only be sustained through dialogue and respect for the right of freedom of movement throughout the country," he tweeted.

In a recording published on Friday, Bashagha said he was "ready for any dialogue" and repeated that he was "a supporter of peace, not war."

"We reassure our compatriots in Tripoli that there will not be a war," he said.



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[Abdulhamid Dbeibah](#)

Rival Libyan premier says he plans to be in Tripoli in days
Armed groups deploy in Tripoli amid Libyan election postponement decision