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Trade between Iran and BRICS member countries amounted to \$18.26 billion during the eight months to Nov. 22, which comprises one-third of Iran's non-oil trade during the period.

The latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration indicate an 8.12% growth in trade between Iran and BRICS member states compared with last year's corresponding period.

BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa that are all leading developing or newly-industrialized countries, but they are distinguished by their large, sometimes fast-growing economies and significant influence on regional affairs; all five are G-20 members.

Iran exported \$7.73 billion worth of non-oil goods to BRICS countries during the eight months, registering a 7.71% growth year-on-year.

Imports from the five countries amounted to \$10.5 billion, which is 8.42% higher YOY.

Financial Tribune's analysis also shows that China accounted for the largest portion of Iran-BRICS trade with 75%, up from last year's 69%. India came next with an 18% share from the total.

Iran's trade with its main trade partner China increased by 18% during the period, standing at \$13.7 billion. With a total trade value of \$3.39 billion, India was the second largest BRICS partner of Iran during the eight-month period, recording a 3.72% growth YOY.

Following were Russia and Brazil with \$627 million and \$563 million, respectively. Trade with Russia and Brazil registered significant drops during the period, 52.1% and 25% respectively, according to the IRICA data.

South Africa's trade with Iran amounted to \$47 million, 3% down lower compared to last year's similar period.

Iran exports to BRICS amounted to \$7.73 billion during the eight months to Nov. 22, registering a 7.71% growth compared with the same period of last year.

China accounted for the largest portion of the amount, importing \$5.7 billion worth of non-oil goods from Iran. India and Russia came next with \$1.78 billion and \$165 million worth of imports from Iran respectively.

IRICA data put Iran's exports to South Africa and Brazil at \$28.7 million and \$9.2 million, respectively.

Exports to Russia increased by 50% during the period, while non-oil exports to Brazil experienced an 87% decrease YOY.

As for Iran's imports, the country imported \$7.9 billion worth of non-oil goods from China, marking a 22% growth YOY. Imports from India grew by 18.12% to stand at \$1.5 billion.

Russia exported \$460 million worth of non-oil goods to Iran during the period, recording a 61% drop compared with last year's \$1.198 billion.

Brazil and South Africa exported \$553 million and \$17.6 million worth of goods to Iran respectively.

> Ambitious Targets

Iran-China Chamber of Commerce has predicted that trade between the two countries would reach \$38 billion by the end of the current Iranian fiscal year (March 20, 2018).

The two countries have set a long-term bilateral trade target of \$600 billion annually. The two countries are hoping that development of China's Belt and Road Initiative will help them meet that target in the coming years.

Back in September, a new freight train service bound for the Iranian capital of Tehran was launched from Yinchuan City of northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.

Passing Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the train travels 20 days faster than a ship, and is expected to greatly lower our delivery costs. China was expected to send more cargo trains to Iran through the route by the end of 2017.

Saurabh Kumar, India's ambassador to Tehran, recently said trade between Iran and India could be increased to \$30 billion.

He said the two countries will soon sign a preferential trade agreement, which could help boost trade relations. Phase 1 of Chabahar development project (Shahid Beheshti Port), which was inaugurated earlier this week, is also expected to contribute to expansion of trade relations between Tehran and New Delhi.

Asadollah Asgaroladi, the head of Iran-Russia Chamber of Commerce, believes political, cultural and social relations between Russia and Iran are mutually agreeable, yet Iran has not been able to gain a foothold in the Russian market and is losing the game to its rivals, mainly Turkey.

Bilateral trade has the potential to be much higher than the current level, Asgaroladi told Financial Tribune earlier in August.

Iran and Brazil also have set a target to increase trade from the current value to \$5 billion annually. However, lack of banking relations has become an obstacle for reaching the target.

Iran's Ambassador to South Africa Mohsen Movahedi Qomi said the two countries have decided to increase two-way trade to \$2 billion by 2020.

> **Improving Environment Post Sanctions**

Export credit agencies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa have each gradually improved Iran's rating in their risk classifications since the nuclear deal was implemented, Arash Shahr-Aeini told Financial Tribune.

The implementation of the nuclear deal, formally known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in January 2016 marks the removal of international nuclear sanctions against Iran as part of a deal signed between Tehran and five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (China, Russia, the US, France and the UK) plus Germany in July 2015.

The elimination of sanctions opened the gates of trade to Iran's economy after years of stringent restrictions on doing business with the Islamic Republic.

China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation, a major state-owned enterprise also known as Sinosure, has given Iran a BB risk rating of five from a scale of nine.

The Export Insurance Agency of Russia, well known as Exiar, has designated a risk rating of four out of seven to Iran while it has managed to acquire a B+ or three out of seven from the longstanding Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India founded in 1957.

The Export Credit Insurance Corporation of South Africa, added Shahr-Aeini, has put Iran's risk classification at five out of seven.

Prospects of Iran's BRICS Accession

Lately, there have been talks about Iran joining BRICS. Back in November, Speaker of South African National Assembly Baleka Mbete said her country is interested to see Iran join BRICS and will push for that, stressing that the 80-million-nation could lend considerable weight to the bloc.

However, Hossein Jaber Ansari, deputy minister of foreign affairs, said Iran prefers to wait for an invitation from the association.

"We always welcome being a member of the international group. If all five countries come to the decision about the entry of Iran, we would welcome it," he said.

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