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Brief Notes

Tehran Denies Using MBS as Intermediary in U.S. Talks: Tehran claims that President Masoud Pezeshkian's recent letter to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman was strictly about thanking Riyadh for its cooperation in organizing safe Hajj pilgrimages for Iranians, dismissing speculation that it contained a message for U.S. President Donald Trump.

Regime Again Claims Enrichment Halted After June Strikes: Pezeshkian administration spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said today that the regime is currently unable to conduct uranium enrichment, citing damage from U.S. strikes on its nuclear facilities. Her comments echoed similar remarks from Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi on Sunday.

Indians No Longer Allowed Visa-Free Travel to Iran: India has warned Indian nationals to avoid offers of visa-free travel or transit via Iran. This announcement was made in conjunction with an Islamic Republic decision to suspend visa waivers for Indian nationals over trafficking concerns, going into effect on November 22. New Delhi said criminal networks exploited the waiver to lure Indians "to Iran on false promises of employment or with assurances of onward transit to third countries…On arrival in Iran, many of them were kidnapped for ransom." India now requires all travelers to obtain visas in advance and has reiterated earlier advisories about the risks of seeking jobs in Iran. The suspension reverses a waiver the regime introduced in February 2024 to boost tourism.

Over Five Million Gallons of Fuel Smuggled Out of Iran Daily: The Law Enforcement Command announced that fuel smuggling has reached an estimated 21 million liters (5,547,613 gallons) per day, though officials acknowledge the real figure is likely higher. Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi noted that gas stations remain key points of diversion. He added that total smuggled goods, both into and out of the country, amount to about $30 billion annually, equivalent to roughly 30% of Iran's economy.

Iranians Hold Protests Over Dam Construction

Residents of Yasuj, the capital of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, held multiple rallies today and yesterday to protest the construction of the Mandegan and Khersan-3 dams. The protesters demanded a halt to the projects, citing environmental, economic, and cultural concerns.

Protesters argued that the dams threaten groundwater and surface water resources, damage oak forests, and generally endanger the region's overall ecosystem. Several protesters raised concerns about the economic impact, including unemployment and the effect on local agriculture. Several activists highlighted potential forced migration, submergence of ancient heritage sites, and further strain on Karun River tributaries.

Participants submitted petitions calling for a review of the projects by the Ministry of Energy.

The demonstrations reflect growing opposition to dam projects throughout the country as Iran's water crisis has deepened, with residents urging authorities to fully consider environmental, economic, and cultural consequences before continuing with the projects. Between 2012 and 2018, the official dam count jumped from 316 to 647, more than doubling in six years.

On the Radar

- Foreign Minister Araghchi used a Caspian forum held in Rasht today, attended by Caspian littoral states' provincial governors, to underscore Tehran's "excellent" relations with all Caspian states, saying, "Our neighbors are our priority. This is the most important principle in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran." Araghchi said the Caspian region is as important to Iran as the Persian Gulf and highlighted ongoing efforts to expand political and economic cooperation with neighbors. The remarks come as Tehran pushes "provincial diplomacy," an initiative empowering border provinces to pursue cross-border economic ties to blunt the impact of sanctions. Officials also floated the creation of joint free-trade zones among Caspian states.
- President Pezeshkian met with Austria's new ambassador in Tehran today, urging him to counter "false anti-Iranian propaganda" and emphasizing that the regime's nuclear program is "entirely within the framework of peaceful use of nuclear energy." He also met ambassadors from Oman, the UAE, and Ghana, highlighting the importance of expanding ties and pursuing "constructive relations based on mutual respect and respect for the territorial integrity of neighbors and other countries." The meeting comes ahead of the IAEA Board of Governors meeting starting tomorrow, where Western powers are expected to sponsor a resolution against the Islamic Republic over inspections and its highly enriched uranium stockpile.
- Islamic Republic First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref used Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meetings in Moscow today to push for deeper economic integration, proposing a joint SCO cryptocurrency and closer fintech and banking cooperation. He also pushed for expanded transport links, highlighting the Chabahar route and the Rasht-Astara rail line as priorities for regional connectivity. Alongside the economic agenda, Aref used the platform to criticize U.S. and Israeli strikes on nuclear facilities in June, and Western sanctions, calling them "harmful to the international economy."

- Retirees in Iran have continued weekly demonstrations across multiple cities, maintaining one of the country's most persistent protest tracks. Retirees from the telecommunications, civil service, and other sectors have held coordinated protests demanding timely payments and inflation-adjusted benefits for the last several years. Their mobilization reflects longstanding financial deficits in pension funds, which officials have repeatedly warned are dependent on state support. Demonstrations are expected to continue as structural problems remain unaddressed.

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