Brief Notes

Tehran Says Hezbollah 'More Necessary for Lebanon Than Bread': Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, said that the Islamic Republic will continue backing Hezbollah, accusing Israel of violating the November 2024 ceasefire and saying Hezbollah is justified in its refusal to disarm. Velayati stated, "The existence of Hezbollah is more necessary for Lebanon than bread." He condemned the killing of Hezbollah commander Haytham Ali al-Tabtabai as a breach of Lebanese sovereignty, with the IRGC separately denouncing the strike and warning of a "crushing response" from the regime's regional network.

Artesh MiG-29 Flies Over Tehran: The Artesh (the conventional armed forces, as opposed to the IRGC) announced that a MiG-29 seen over Tehran today was part of a "routine" flight meant to ensure "sustainable security," following public concern on social media. The Artesh Air Force said the jet was flying alongside other aircraft and that similar maneuvers will continue.

Security Chief Sets Conditions for Future U.S. Talks: Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani said the Islamic Republic will only engage in "realistic" negotiations with the U.S., rejecting what he called "showpiece" diplomacy. He also argued Israel faces a "crisis of legitimacy" and said its power is "limited and artificial." He added that Tehran sees "no limit" to expanding cooperation with Pakistan while urging calm in Pakistan–Afghanistan tensions.

Regime Outlets Continue to Deny Rumors of Saudi Mediation: Semi-official Mehr News today quoted "informed sources" who claim reports of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) mediating talks between Washington and Tehran are "completely false," pushing back on claims most recently circulated by Lebanon's Al-Akhbar newspaper. The denial follows controversy over President Masoud Pezeshkian's message to MBS ahead of his recent visit to Washington, which officials insist was merely gratitude for Saudi management of the Hajj. Some regime-aligned sources had suggested Pezeshkian sought Saudi assistance in communications with Washington.

Khamenei Absent From Basij Day Following Warning of 'Enemy Plots': The regime celebrated Basij Day today at the Supreme Leader's residence, attended by IRGC Commander Maj. Gen. Mohammad Pakpour and hundreds of Basij members, where Khamenei was notably absent, despite the fact that he usually delivers a speech on this occasion. Basij chief Brig. Gen. Gholamreza Soleimani praised the force as key to "building power" and promoting a "culture of resistance" across the defense and technology industries. The Supreme Leader recently attended

some, but not all, nights of religious ceremonies marking the "martyrdom of Fatimah," the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. On November 22, Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib warned of enemy plots targeting Khamenei.

Lufthansa to Resume Flights to Iran in January: Lufthansa will resume flights to Iran on January 16, 2026, following several rounds of safety assessments and consultations with the Islamic Republic's Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Regime officials said the airline, alongside Austrian Airlines, evaluated Tehran's airport infrastructure and procedures before approving the resumption. Lufthansa had initially suspended flights in June during the 12-Day War.

New Fuel Pricing Scheme Unveiled Immediately Following Government Denials

The regime is moving ahead with a third, higher fuel-pricing tier despite weeks of official denials. The move is to be implemented in line with yesterday's "leaked" directive, signed by President Masoud Pezeshkian, which has evoked comparisons to the 2019 hike that triggered nationwide protests known as Bloody November, or Bloody Aban, in which over 1,000 protestors were killed.

State-aligned outlets largely defended the change as long-overdue reform to curb smuggling, correct structural distortions, and reduce "rent for the privileged."

Online reactions were overwhelmingly negative, with users predicting broader subsidy cuts in the near future as well as accusing Pezeshkian of breaking campaign promises and statements from previous weeks and days. Many argued the new tier is a precursor of increases to the base price.

On the Radar

- Islamic Republic Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, in a call with his Venezuelan counterpart, denounced what he called Washington's "bullying" in the Western Hemisphere. Araghchi urged a collective international response to U.S. "unilateralism" and warned that both the U.S. and Israel's activities in Latin America pose a major threat to regional stability.
- Araghchi visited Paris today for talks with his French counterpart on bilateral issues, regional tensions, and the regime's nuclear program, amid friction over the recent IAEA Board of Governors resolution. Some state-linked outlets dismissed the trip as futile, accusing Europe of being unreasonably hostile towards Tehran.

→ *For inquiries or more information, please contact* ***k.isfahani@nufdiran.org***