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Iran

Digest

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IAEA Chief's Meeting in Iran 'inconclusive'

Rafael Grossi, chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) visited Tehran ahead of the agency's Board of Governors meeting on November 24. IAEA's monitoring access to Karaj centrifuge component manufacturing workshop remained a contentious issue during Grossi's talks with Mohammad Eslami, chief of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran. After the Karaj facility came under a sabotage attack in June 2021, Iran denied IAEA access on the ground that it was investigating the potential role of the Agency's cameras in assisting the attacks, a charge that IAEA has "[categorically](#)" denied. Under a temporary agreement reached with the IAEA in September, Iran had allowed IAEA inspectors to service surveillance equipment but has not granted them monitoring access. Further, Iran refuses to give IAEA access to the replaced memory cards, which are stored on Iranian soil. Grossi therefore stated in the Board of Governors meeting that the lack of access to Karaj "[seriously affects](#) the Agency's ability to restore continuity of knowledge."

Iran's Lead Nuclear Negotiator travels to the UAE

On November 24, Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's deputy foreign minister and top nuclear negotiator met with Khalifa Shaheen, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Anwar Gargash, diplomatic adviser to the UAE President in Dubai. During the meeting the two sides agreed that a "[new chapter](#)" in the two countries bilateral relations needs to be opened. In October 2021, Foreign Minister Hossein Abdollahian, while calling on the US president to re-enter JCPOA through an executive order had sought to reassure

Iran's Gulf neighbours that the nuclear deal "will not be against the region or our neighbours" and that Iranian "negotiators should [appraise neighbours](#) and key regional players of nuclear talks." Similarly, the Biden administration has been consulting Gulf States and Israel in run up to the resumption of nuclear negotiation with Iran in Vienna. In November, US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley and National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk [visited UAE](#), Israel, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to coordinate ahead of the revival of talks with Iran.

IRGC Aerospace Commander says war with US could lead to '10-20 year setback'

On November 19, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, Commander of the Aerospace Force of the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in an interview with Emtedad TV, run by Basij wing of Sharif University of Technology, stated that in response to the US assassination of Soleimani, "we could have started a [full-scale war](#) by targeting all American bases in the Middle East" but as a result "country could have faced a 10 to 20 year setback." Therefore the "political establishment raised the matter of rather focussing on expelling the US from the region," Hajizadeh said. He went on to argue that Iran's "security has been damaged owing to the pro-west administrations," adding that "pro-west" diplomacy puts little faith in the Islamic Republic's military prowess. During Rouhani administration, tensions between the Foreign Ministry and the IRGC on regional policy and nuclear issues came to fore on many occasions. In a recording leaked in April 2021, Former Foreign Minister (FM) Javad Zarif complained how

[‘field operations’](#) (by IRGC Quds Force) never budged to give way to diplomacy.

Iranian Foreign Minister Meets Azerbaijan’s Deputy Prime Minister

On November 22, Shahin Mustafayev, Deputy Prime Minister of Republic of Azerbaijan made a one-day visit to Iran. Iranian FM Hossein Amir Abdollahian in meeting with Mustafayev stated that Iranian companies are ready to participate in the reconstruction of the liberated areas. Abdollahian, while reaffirming support for territorial integrity of countries, stressed that international [borders](#) are unchangeable. In recent months tensions spiraled between Tehran and Baku after the latter objected to Iran’s transit to Armenia and ethnic-Armenian held parts of Nagorno Karabakh via territories liberated by Baku in last year’s war with Armenia. Further, Iran has fervently opposed Baku’s irredentist claim on southernmost Armenian province adjoining Iran. Analysts observe that Iran fears Turkey and Azerbaijan are trying to create a [‘Turkic belt’](#) along Iran’s entire northern border, and fan pan-Azeri sentiments among Iran’s Azeri minority residing in Iran’s three border. In an indication of de-escalation of tensions, Tehran agreed to [swap gas supplies](#) to Azerbaijan from neighbouring Turkmenistan.

Water Protests spread in Iran

On November 8, farmers from across Isfahan province in central Iran gathered in the dry river bed of Zayandeh Rud in Isfahan city with one key demand: [“let the river run.”](#) The protests swelled to thousands on November 19 marking two-year anniversary of nation-wide protests prompted by sudden increase in gasoline prices. Zayandeh Rud and Karun River originate from Zard Koh Bakhtiari in central Zagros range in Chaharmahal and

Bakhtiari province. A two mile tunnel diverts water from upper courses of Karun River to Zayandeh Rud, which flows south-east irrigating agricultural districts in Yazd and Isfahan. Karun River is also the major source of water for oil-rich border province of Khuzestan. In July, Khuzestan residents took to street blaming the drying of Karun River on oil industry and [diversion](#) of water to other areas. The fears of water diversion have led people from Shahrekord in [Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari](#) province to protest against transfer of water to other provinces for industrial projects.

Iran fully vaccinates half its population

On November 20, Iran announced it has fully vaccinated 44 million, more than half of its population of 85 million. Iran is using a combination of domestically produced COVIran ‘Berket’ (produced by Setad, a powerful state organisation under Supreme Leader) and imported vaccines. According to Islamic Republic of Iran Customs-Administration the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses imported into the country from February 4 to November 1, 2021 exceeded [146 million](#) of which nearly 130 million were doses of ‘Sinopharm’ imported from China. The second highest number of vaccine imports was of Russia’s ‘Sputnik V.’ In January, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had banned the government from importing COVID-19 vaccines from [‘untrustworthy’](#) Western powers, namely the UK and the United States. However, after US [Treasury Department](#) exempted financial transactions involving imports of vaccine and medical equipment, Iran has imported several batches of vaccines developed by British-Swedish pharma group [AstraZeneca](#) from Austria, Italy, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Japan and India among others.