



Iranian taxi drivers splash water on themselves to cool down during the heat surge in Tehran, August 2, 2023.



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Heatwave Or Bankruptcy: Why Is Iran Really In Shutdown?

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Iran Politics Economy & Environment

Iran's two-day shutdown was announced as a measure to reduce health risks, but many believe it is a ruse to distract from electricity, gas and water shortages.

The Iranian government has declared a national holiday on Wednesday and Thursday, with speculations that it could extend to Saturday, claiming that the move is to safeguard the well-being of its citizens as temperatures soar.

Pedram Pakain, the spokesperson of the Health Ministry, said the holidays may be extended due to the heatwave, a statement reiterated by Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi.

Social media, where Iranians still freely voice their thoughts on the truths behind the regime's trickery, saw many voicing concern that the national holidays could be a prelude to raise fuel prices, an impending eventuality that the government keeps postponing in fear of its consequences.



A woman walks in a street during the heat surge in Tehran, Iran, August 2, 2023.

Iranians have seen far hotter days and no shutdowns in the past. Reformist activist and former political prisoner Hadi Mehrani shared a letter by Iran's Prosecutor-General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, who has ordered prosecutors across the country to summon leaders of Women, Life, Liberty protests - the ones no longer in prison - to warn them against organizing fresh protests ahead of the anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini that sparked the uprising in September. He suggested that the holidays may be related to the mass call-out.

Payam-e Ma newspaper cited an informed yet unnamed source from the Energy Ministry as saying that the reason behind the shutdown was the country's electricity shortages. The constant rise in temperatures and decrease in rainfall across the country in the last decade have made electricity supply a challenge during peak consumption periods that happen in summers in Iran. In July, Iran's electricity usage hit a record of 72,500 megawatts, increasing strain on power grids that were already struggling to meet demand.

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An Iranian man drinks soda during the heat surge in Tehran August 2, 2023.

"High temperature and increased electricity consumption in the past days have led the hydroelectric power plants of Karun-3 and Karun-4 dams – on the Iranian river with the highest water flow – to produce electricity beyond their nominal capacity," the daily said. The power plants were reportedly generating electricity for more than 20 hours per day in the past several days, leading to a "depletion of water resources," which caused the plants to "temporarily cease production."

Power plant capacity and fuel supply are both inadequate to meet demand, and blackouts regularly happen in summer. Even so, Iran exports electricity to Iraq. In dire need of significant investment, Iran's electricity sector has failed to realize its annual growth plan for several years in a row, while consumption continues to grow, in part driven by extremely low prices.

The country needs at least five to seven percent electricity generation growth annually to address the increase in domestic demand. It has been an ongoing problem for the country which has one of the biggest natural oil and gas reserves in the world. In 2021, mass protests erupted after nationwide blackouts. With current tensions and an ongoing economic crisis, another mass breakdown could revive the unrest which has swept the country since September.



An Iranian man rests in the shade of a tree during the heat surge in Tehran, August 2, 2023.

Iranian environmentalist Kaveh Madani – the former deputy head of Iran's department of environment who heads the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, reacted to the theories in a thread of tweets on Wednesday, stating that **Iran's bankruptcy of water**, electricity, and gas cannot be solved by simply shutting down the country.

"Even if you build hundreds of dams, without proper management, the water will eventually run out!" he said, explaining that the problem of "Iran's water, gas and electricity bankruptcy cannot be solved by shutting down just as the problem of dust and air pollution was not solved by shutting down."

Madani added that the roots of Iran's gas bankruptcy bear striking resemblance to the roots of its water bankruptcy but there is a crucial difference in the water and energy sectors: Iran's water is naturally limited, but the country holds one of the world's largest natural gas reserves.

Echoing the same argument, Nikahang Kowsar, a water issues analyst, told Iran International that a lack of planning for the use of renewable energy and disregarding climate change in the regime's development policies have brought Iran to a point of no return.

No matter what the reason behind the shutdowns, Iranians are worried. Worried that it may be a ploy to avert their attention from something bigger and worried that regular shutdowns will be their new normal because they have seen that the regime is incapable of solving such problems for good.