



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

# WEST ASIA DIGEST

*Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia*

- **Prime Minister Modi visits UAE and Qatar**
- **Indian delegation at World Defence Show in Riyadh**
- **India and Qatar sign long-term LNG deal**
- **Situation in the Red Sea continues to remain tense**
- **US conducts airstrikes in Iraq and Syria**
- **Turkiye to provide drones to Egypt**
- **UAE removed from FATF Grey List**
- **Friendship Bridge between Bahrain and Qatar**
- **US criticises Israeli Settlement expansion**
- **Kuwait's Emir dissolves National Assembly**
- **Palestinian Authority Prime Minister resigns**

## **Prime Minister Modi visits UAE and Qatar**

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to the UAE from 13-14 February 2024. He met with the UAE President, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and discussed diverse areas of cooperation such as trade and investment, digital infrastructure, fintech, energy, infrastructure, culture and people-to-people ties. India and the UAE signed MoUs on Bilateral Investment Treaty and various MoUs, covering electricity interconnection and trade, digital infrastructure, collaboration for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, national libraries, development of the National Maritime Heritage Complex in Gujarat, and interlinking of domestic debit/credit cards. Discussions also emphasised strengthening the energy partnership and building port infrastructure for enhanced connectivity. Modi inaugurated the BAPS Temple in Abu Dhabi and addressed the Indian community as well. On 14 February 2024, Modi participated in the World Governments Summit in Dubai as the Guest of Honour. Modi highlighted India's governance reforms, focusing on "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance." He underscored India's utilisation of digital technology for welfare, inclusivity, and sustainability, advocating for a human-centric approach to governance and emphasising people's participation, last-mile delivery, and women-led development.

From the UAE, Modi visited Qatar from 14-15 February 2024. In his meeting with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Modi discussed economic cooperation, investments, energy partnership, space collaboration, urban

infrastructure, cultural bonds and people-to-people ties. They also discussed recent regional developments, emphasising the importance of peace and stability in West Asia and beyond. Sheikh Tamim expressed appreciation for the contribution of the Indian community to Qatar's development and India's role as a valued partner in the Gulf region.

## **Indian delegation at World Defence Show in Riyadh**

India's Minister of State for Defence, Ajay Bhatt, led the Indian delegation to the World Defence Show (WDS) 2024 in Riyadh. The five-day event in February 2024 showcased the latest in defence technology and served as a crucial platform for international collaboration. During his visit, Ajay Bhatt engaged in discussions with key Saudi officials, including Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Assistant Minister of Defence Khaled Al Bayari. Talks focused on enhancing the defence cooperation between the two countries, covering joint training exercises, technology transfer and expertise exchange. The interactions with Indian defence companies and a business networking event further strengthened ties, aligning with the shared goals of India's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and Saudi Arabia's 'Vision 2030' initiatives, emphasising technological advancements and knowledge sharing.

## **India and Qatar sign long-term LNG deal**

QatarEnergy and India's Petronet LNG Ltd. have signed a major deal for liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply to India. Under the agreement, Qatar will provide 7.5 million metric tons of LNG annually to Petronet LNG Ltd. from 2028 to 2048. The deal was signed on the sidelines of India Energy

Week (IEW) held in Goa where Qatar's energy minister and other senior officials from QatarEnergy also participated. Petronet has stated that the deal "will ensure energy security of India and assure continued supplies of regasified LNG to major consuming sectors like fertilisers, CGD, refineries, petrochemical, power and other industries."

### **Situation in the Red Sea continues to remain tense**

On 19 February 2024, the EU officially launched a naval mission named 'Aspides' to protect commercial vessels in the Red Sea from attacks by the Houthis. The mission aims to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. France, Germany, Italy and Belgium have confirmed their participation in the EU mission, contributing ships. The mission has a defensive mandate and will only respond to threats. Moreover, On 25 February 2024, the US and UK launched airstrikes targeting 18 Houthi militia sites in Yemen in response to recent attacks on ships in the Red Sea. American and British fighter jets struck missiles, launchers, drones and air defence systems. This marks the fourth joint operation against Houthis since January 2024. The Houthis denounced the strikes, pledging continued military operations. The attacks aim to deter Houthi assaults on shipping, which escalated amid the Israel-Hamas War.

### **US conducts airstrikes in Iraq and Syria**

The US conducted airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, targeting over 85 sites associated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its supported militias. The strikes reportedly resulted in nearly 40 casualties. The US launched strikes in response to an

attack on its troops in Jordan that killed three American troops. Iran condemned the action, warning of increased tension and instability. Iraq protested against the use of its territory for settling scores between warring nations, calling airstrikes a violation of Iraqi sovereignty.

### **Turkiye to provide drones to Egypt**

Turkiye and Egypt have reached an agreement to supply Egypt with advanced drones known for their effectiveness in various conflicts. The deal emphasises the importance of normalising relations between the two nations, enabling Egypt to access critical technologies from Turkiye. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated, "Normalisation in our relations is important for Egypt to have certain technologies. We have an agreement to provide (Egypt) unmanned air vehicles and other technologies." This development marks a step in diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties and foster collaboration in defence and technology between Turkiye and Egypt. In this backdrop, the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Cairo adds further strength to their bilateral relations. Erdogan met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi and discussed a host of bilateral and regional issues.

### **UAE removed from FATF Grey List**

On 23 February 2024, the UAE was removed from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) 'grey list' of countries at risk of illicit money flows. FATF acknowledged the UAE's efforts in combating financial crime, particularly money laundering and terrorist financing. Following increased scrutiny in 2022, the move is seen as a significant win for the UAE and is expected to enhance its

international credibility. The UAE, known for its economic prowess and attractiveness to global investors, had prioritised anti-money laundering measures to secure its removal from the list. The UAE's commitment to strengthening anti-money laundering measures aligns with its broader strategy to attract foreign investment and develop non-oil sectors.

### **Friendship Bridge between Bahrain and Qatar**

The Friendship Bridge project, envisioned in 2008 to connect Bahrain and Qatar, has emerged as a powerful symbol of reconciliation, ambition, and economic prosperity. The project faced setbacks because of the Qatar crisis of 2017, but the thaw in relations, marked by the Al Ula Declaration in 2021, paved the way for its revival. On 20 February 2024, the Qatari-Bahraini Follow-up Committee convened its fourth meeting in Manama, Bahrain, reiterated its commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and reaffirmed the project's significance for them. Beyond its US\$ 3 billion estimated cost, the Friendship Bridge embodies hope for growth and prosperity for both the countries and their neighbourhood.

### **US criticises Israeli Settlement expansion**

On 23 February 2024, the Biden Administration declared that Israel's expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank is inconsistent with international law. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed disappointment over Israel's plan for new housing in the West Bank, labelling it as counterproductive to achieving lasting peace. This shift reflects a renewed American commitment to a two-state solution and aligns with recent sanctions imposed on individuals involved in settler

violence. The announcement comes amid Israel's approval of plans for over 3,300 homes in settlements, drawing condemnation from Palestinians and emphasising the ongoing challenges in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **Kuwait's Emir dissolves National Assembly**

On 15 February 2024, Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah dissolved the parliament, known as the National Assembly, following a political crisis. The dissolution was anticipated after the Assembly declined to retract remarks by a lawmaker deemed disrespectful to the ruling authority. The Emiri decree cited a breach of constitutional principles, particularly disrespect of esteemed positions and offensive language used by parliament members. Reportedly, elections are expected to be held within two months, as required by law. This crisis emerged when lawmakers refused to retract comments seen as insults during discussions on an Emiri speech.

### **Palestinian Authority Prime Minister resigns**

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh submitted his resignation on 26 February 2024 amid calls for a revamped Palestinian Authority (PA) role following Israel's conflict with Hamas in Gaza. PA President Mahmoud Abbas accepted the resignation, appointing Shtayyeh as caretaker until a new Prime Minister is named. The PA faces accusations of ineffectiveness and corruption. Shtayyeh emphasised the need for new governance arrangements, considering Gaza's reality and urging PA authority extension. The move aims to secure PA leadership amid calls for Palestinian statehood.