



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Iraq hosts Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership

The Iraq government organised a regional peace conference named as Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership on August 28 to discuss challenges, common issues and future prospects. The Conference brought together leaders from Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. Heads of State attending the Conference included Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim and French President Emmanuel Macron. The leaders stressed the need to unify regional and international efforts for the stability and security of the region and emphasised their support for Iraq's reconstruction and to ensure the voluntary and dignified return of the displaced Iraqis to their areas. Iraqi officials stated that they did not expect any diplomatic breakthroughs in the Conference, but getting all these regional countries to sit around the table to discuss the issues is an achievement.

Israel, Qatar and UN reach an agreement on resumption of aid to Gaza

Israel, Qatar and the UN agreed on a mechanism to disburse aid to the Gaza Strip. As per the deal, a sum of US\$ 100 per family will be transferred to 100,000 families residing in the Gaza Strip by the UN, starting in September. Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said that under the new mechanism funds will be transferred to hundreds of thousands of Gazan people by the UN directly to their bank accounts, with Israel overseeing the recipients. The aid to

Gaza was blocked by Israel after the May conflict with Hamas, fearing that the money would reach the hands of Hamas. Prior to the war, every month an amount of US\$ 30 million was transferred in cash to Gaza through the border crossing controlled by Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister visits US

Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennett was on a two-day visit to the US. He met with US President Joe Biden on August 27 who expressed his full support for Israel's security and right to self-defence. Biden further assured Bennett that Iran will not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons and both the leaders discussed steps to contain Iran's maligning regional activities. Biden expressed his full support for Israel's ties with the Arab and Muslim countries around the world. They also discussed ways to advance peace and security for Israel and Palestine.

King Abdullah of Jordan visits Russia

Jordan's King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein visited Russia on August 23. He met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and had talks on a wide range of issues including the Israel-Palestine conflict, Syria, Afghanistan and Libya. Abdullah visited the International Military-Technical Forum "Army-2021" and took note of the latest Russian military technology. President Putin stated that the ties between Russia and Jordan are constantly flourishing in multi-dimensional areas such as trade, economy and agriculture. He also emphasised expanding the cooperation in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Japanese Foreign Minister visits seven countries in West Asia

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi visited Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey and Qatar to discuss regional security in West Asia and the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. During his visit to Iran, he met with President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. They discussed a range of issues including Iran's nuclear deal and the developing situation in Afghanistan.

In Qatar, he participated in the first "Japan-Qatar Strategic Dialogue." Motegi also introduced Japan's efforts to achieve a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and stated that this vision will contribute to the development in the region. As Qatar has hosted the Afghanistan peace negotiations, both sides discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and future prospects and confirmed that they would continue to cooperate.

Motegi reiterated that Japan supports a "two-state solution" to the Israel-Palestine conflict. He requested Israel to continue their cooperation for the implementation of Japanese assistance to the Palestinians, including the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative. During his meeting with Egyptian officials, both sides affirmed the need for continuing consultation and coordination in the different international forums, especially for the upcoming Tokyo International Conference on African Development set to be held in Tunisia next year.

Saudi Crown Prince meets Qatari Foreign Minister

The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met Qatar's Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani in the city of NEOM on August 25. Both sides discussed bilateral cooperation in several areas along with the regional developments. Earlier this month, Qatar appointed an ambassador to Riyadh following Saudi Arabia reinstating its envoy to Doha. Post Al Ula summit, the relations of Doha with the quartet of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt are being normalised.

UAE and Egypt conduct joint military exercise

UAE and Egypt conducted a multi-day military exercise *Zayed-3* consisting of joint flights conducted via the use of multi-purpose fighter aircraft and missions which involved defending important locations as well as attacking enemy targets on August 14. The exercise aimed to improve train forces of the two countries in air combat strategies. The exercise is a part of the UAE's efforts to enhance its military cooperation with Egypt's Armed Forces, and encourage the exchange of expertise to boost their capabilities and be prepared to deal with future threats to the region's stability and security.

EAM visits Qatar and Iran

External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar visited Doha and Tehran to discuss issues of mutual interest, especially the rapid deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan. This is

Dr. Jaishankar's third visit to Doha and second to Tehran in the past two months. They also discussed bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on further strengthening India's ties with Qatar and Iran. At the invitation of the government of Iran, Dr. Jaishankar also attended the swearing-in ceremony of President Ebrahim Raisi on August 5.

Indian Navy conducts joint exercises with Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia

Indian Navy conducted the second joint exercise *Zair Al Bahr* with the Qatar Emiri Naval Force from August 09-14. The exercises included a three-day harbor phase followed by a two-day sea phase, in which Indian Navy Stealth Frigate INS Trikanth, Qatar's Missile Boats of Barzan and Damsah class, Fast-Attack Crafts and Rafale Fighter Aircraft participated. The sea phase comprised of tactical maritime exercises involving surface action, anti-piracy exercises, air defense, maritime surveillance, boarding operations etc.

Prior to this, the Indian Navy undertook bilateral exercise *Zayed Talwar 2021* with the UAE Navy off the coast of Abu Dhabi on August 7. The participating ships undertook tactical manoeuvres, over the horizon targeting, search and rescue and electronic warfare exercises to enhance interoperability and synergy between the two navies as part of the exercise.

Also, India and Saudi Arabia conducted their first joint naval exercise named *Al Mohed Al Hindi*. The exercise included harbor and sea phase.

Air Chief Marshal Bhadauria visits Israel and UAE

Indian Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria was on an official four-day visit to Israel. During the visit, he met with his Israeli counterpart Major General Amikam Norkin and had an extensive discussion on various issues of mutual interest and defence cooperation. The visit aimed at enhancing bilateral defence ties between the countries and reaffirming multidisciplinary professional exchanges for the future.

Earlier, Bhadauria embarked on an official goodwill visit to UAE upon the invitation from Major General Ibrahim Nasser M. Al Alawi Commander of the UAE Air Force and Air Defence. Indian Air Force and its UAE counterpart have had significant professional interactions in the past few years and the visit intends to further strengthen the defence cooperation between the two countries.

India and Oman sign agreement on Green Hydrogen

The Oman Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed a land lease agreement with the Acme Group, for the establishment of a major Green Hydrogen & Ammonia Project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. ACME Group is India's largest solar power developer and has three GW of solar power capacity. The agreement is in line with OPAZ's efforts to promote investment in clean energy, especially in the production of Green Hydrogen and Ammonia from renewable energy resources.