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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Hamas launches terror attacks on Israel

Thousands of heavily armed Hamas terrorists launched a massive terror attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. They launched rockets into Israel, breached the border fence, and used paragliders and speedboats to enter Israel. Large explosive devices were used to breach the border fence, allowing hundreds of terrorists to infiltrate and attack Israeli Army posts and people living in nearby kibbutzs. As per the Israeli Government, more than 1400 Israelis have been killed, over 5400 are wounded and 222 Israelis have been taken hostage by Hamas in Gaza. In response, Israel has launched “Operation Swords of Iron” and officially declared war on Hamas. Israel has launched massive airstrikes, mobilised around 360,000 reservists and started a ground offensive into Gaza. The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza has said that over 9000 Palestinians have been killed and thousands have been wounded in Israeli strikes since October 7, 2023.

Cairo Peace Summit on Palestine

On October 21, 2023, a one-day Cairo Peace Summit was convened by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi in Cairo to deescalate tensions following the tension between Hamas and Israel. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged sustained humanitarian aid delivery to Gaza and the immediate release of all hostages held by Hamas. Guterres emphasised the urgent need for continuous aid delivery to Gaza, called for adherence to international humanitarian law and reiterated support for a two-state solution. Representatives from various countries, including Jordan, France, Germany, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, the United States, Qatar and South Africa, participated along with officials from the United Nations and the European Union. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas attended the summit,

urging the opening of humanitarian corridors. However, the absence of any official representative from Israel has dampened expectations regarding the potential outcomes of the summit.

India sends humanitarian aid to Palestine

On October 22, 2023, India dispatched humanitarian aid to the people of Palestine through an IAF C-17 flight that reached El Arish airport in Egypt. The flight carried approximately 6.5 tonnes of medical assistance and 32 tonnes of disaster relief materials. The aid package encompassed crucial life-saving medicines, surgical items, tents, sleeping bags, tarpaulins, sanitary utilities, and water purification tablets, among other essential items. This initiative demonstrates India’s commitment to providing support and relief to those in need, emphasising a humanitarian response to address the urgent requirements of the affected population in Palestine. India has consistently supported Palestine and Palestinian refugees by making substantial contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Between 2002 and 2023, India has provided a total of US\$ 29.53 million for Palestine. Notably, India augmented its annual contribution from US\$ 1.25 million to US\$ 5 million in 2018. Furthermore, India has committed to maintaining this increased annual contribution of US\$ 5 million for the next two years, demonstrating a sustained commitment to addressing the needs of Palestinian refugees through international channels.

India has also reiterated its long-standing and consistent policy on Palestine. India emphasised its unwavering support for the resumption of direct negotiations aimed at establishing a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine to coexist peacefully with Israel within secure and recognised borders. India’s position favours

direct negotiations for establishing a two-state solution.

Hezbollah holds talks with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad

On October 25, 2023, Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah held talks with Ziad Al Nakhleh, the head of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Saleh Al Arouri, Hamas deputy chief in Beirut. It is the first reported meeting since the Hamas-Israel war erupted and clashes began along the Lebanon-Israel border. They agreed on the next steps to be taken to achieve a victory for the resistance in Gaza and Palestine. The discussions occurred as the Israel-Hamas conflict entered its third week, with casualties mounting on both sides. Nasrallah, whose Hezbollah members clashed with Israeli troops along the Lebanon-Israel border, has yet to publicly address the situation, while Hezbollah warns against Israel's planned ground invasion of Gaza. Citing cross-border attacks by Hezbollah from Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned Hezbollah by stating that "we will cripple it with a force it cannot even imagine, and the consequences for it and the Lebanese state (will be) devastating."

ASEAN-GCC Summit held in Saudi Arabia

On October 20, 2023, Leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) convened the ASEAN-GCC Riyadh Summit in Saudi Arabia, co-chaired by the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and President of Indonesia Joko Widodo. Key points of the Summit include the GCC members joining the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, a declaration to promote peace, security, and prosperity, and the endorsement of the ASEAN-GCC Framework of Cooperation (2024-2028). The areas of collaboration agreed between the two sides include trade,

investment, maritime cooperation, sustainability, digital transformation, and cultural exchanges. Saudi Arabia will host the first ASEAN-GCC Economic and Investment Conference in 2024. The summit aimed to foster a commitment to diverse partnerships, climate action, and joint efforts for a sustainable future. The summit witnessed the participation of leaders of ASEAN and the GCC Member States and Secretary Generals of both ASEAN and GCC.

South Korean President visits Saudi Arabia and Qatar

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's state visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 21 to 24 October 2023 saw the adoption of a joint statement emphasising the deepening of bilateral ties. Both countries pledged to advance their strategic partnership, signifying their commitment to Vision 2030 and cooperation in areas like trade, defence, energy, and cultural exchanges. The Saudi-Korean Vision 2030 Committee and Strategic Partnership Council were highlighted for enhancing economic collaboration. Both sides underlined support for Vision 2030 projects, appreciated economic achievements, and expressed solidarity on regional and global issues, including the Israel-Palestine conflict, Yemen crisis, and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. In Qatar, President Yoon held a summit with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The agenda focused on expanding cooperation beyond traditional areas like energy and construction, encompassing investment, defence, agriculture, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. President Yoon also attended the 2023 International Horticultural Exposition in Doha, participated in a bilateral business forum, and engaged with young Qatari leaders at Education City. This state visit marked the first by any South Korean President to Qatar.