



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*

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## **NSAs of India, US, Saudi Arabia and UAE meet in Riyadh**

National Security Advisers (NSAs) of India, US and UAE met in Riyadh on May 7, 2023 and held discussions to further their collective aspiration for the West Asian region. A planned collaborative effort among four nations aimed to discuss a significant infrastructure initiative. It involves connecting Gulf and Arab countries through an extensive railway network that would also integrate with shipping lanes connecting to India from regional ports. The purpose of the meeting was to advance their collective vision of fostering a more secure and prosperous West Asian region that is interconnected with India and the global community.

## **Erdogan wins Turkiye's Presidential Elections**

Recep Tayyip Erdogan won Turkiye's election to remain as the president of the country for the third term. The Presidential election race proceeded to a runoff on May 28 as no candidate received more than 50 per cent of votes as required. The Presidential runoff election was contested between Erdogan and Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the joint candidate of the six-party opposition Nation Alliance, who received 47.2 per cent of votes. Erdogan secured more than 52.18 per cent of the votes in the runoff, thereby winning the Turkish Presidential election. Sinan Oğan of the Ancestral Alliance, who received 5.17% of the vote in the first round, endorsed Erdogan for the presidential runoff. Erdogan's People's Alliance emerged as the majority in Turkish Parliament as well.

## **India and Saudi Arabia hold joint naval exercise 'Al Mohed Al Hindi 2023'**

In a significant development for the defence cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia, the INS Tarkash, a state-of-the-art frigate, and INS Subhadra, a patrol vessel, reached Port Al Jubail for the harbour phase of the joint naval exercise 'Al-Mohed Al-Hindi 2023' held from 21 to May 25 2023. This exercise aimed to strengthen maritime security, facilitate information sharing, and enhance interoperability between the Indian and Saudi naval forces. The collaboration reflects the deepening of defence ties between both countries and contributes to regional security in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf region.

## **32<sup>nd</sup> Arab League Summit held in Jeddah**

The Arab League held its 32<sup>nd</sup> Summit in Jeddah on May 19, 2023, with representatives from all 22 member states participating for the first time in over a decade. The summit discussed various topics, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation in Sudan, the peace process in Yemen, instability in Libya, and Lebanon's political crisis. They adopted the Jeddah Declaration, emphasising the Arab League's united stance on achieving security and stability in the region and beyond. The Declaration underscored the importance of sustainable development, security, stability, and peaceful living for all Arab citizens. Member states committed to combating crime and corruption, mobilising capabilities, promoting innovation for security, stability and well-being. Syria was invited to participate in the Arab League Summit for the first time since its suspension from the organisation in

2011. The declaration made during the summit emphasised that Syria's reintegration into the Arab League would aid in stabilising and reunifying the country. Member states pledged their assistance to help Syria overcome its crisis and regain its status as a constructive member of the Arab world.

### **Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs visits India**

Israeli Foreign Minister Eliyahu Cohen visited India on May 9, 2023, accompanied by a 37-member business delegation and senior Israeli government officials. During the visit, he discussed with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, emphasising the deepening innovation partnership between India and Israel. Bilateral talks with Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar covered various areas of cooperation, including connectivity, mobility, research, fintech, agriculture, water and trade. Both sides also discussed regional and international issues of mutual interest. Cohen paid homage to Indian martyrs at Teen Murti Haifa Chowk, symbolising the friendship between the two countries. A 'Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Temporary Employment of Workers' was signed, and Letters of Intent were exchanged for water technology and agricultural innovation centres. Cohen also met with India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, to explore further defence and security cooperation between the two countries.

### **Egypt mediates ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad**

Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the Gaza Strip reached a ceasefire,

facilitated by Egypt, on May 13, 2023, concluding a period of intense conflict continuing for five days. Egypt called upon both Israel and the PIJ to respect and comply with the ceasefire agreement. Although Israel accepted the ceasefire, it did not meet the Islamic Jihad's demand to cease all targeted assassinations. According to ceasefire agreement, both parties have agreed to adhere to the terms of the ceasefire, which encompass various provisions such as the cessation of targeting civilians, the discontinuation of house demolitions and an immediate halt to targeting individuals. The conflict that was triggered by the death of a PIJ terrorist in Israeli prison led to the death of around 33 Palestinians, and at least 77 Israelis got wounded. According to the Israeli military, it carried out strikes against 371 targets belonging to the PIJ.

### **Iraq's "Route of Development" project to transform into regional transportation hub**

Iraq has unveiled an ambitious plan to transform itself into a regional transportation hub by developing its road and rail infrastructure. The US\$ 17 billion project, named the "Route of Development," aims to connect Europe with the Gulf and other West Asian countries. The proposed route would span 1,200 kilometres (745 miles) from the northern border with Turkey to the southern Gulf region. The project is crucial for Iraq's economic diversification efforts and regional integration. By developing the road and rail corridor, Iraq aims to leverage its strategic location and become a key transportation hub for goods and people travelling between the Gulf, Turkey, and

Europe. The plan involves constructing approximately 15 stations along the route, including in major cities such as Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, extending up to the Turkish border. Additionally, efforts have begun to expand capacity at the Al Faw commercial port on the Gulf coast, where container ships will unload goods before proceeding via the new road and rail links.

### **Iran and Egypt to restore diplomatic ties**

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressed his willingness to welcome the restoration of full diplomatic relations between Egypt and Iran, suggesting the possibility of normalising ties between the two nations after years of strained relations. The statement was made during a meeting between Khamenei and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman, who visited Tehran. Muscat has been serving the role of mediator between Tehran and the West for a long time. It may be noted that Baghdad has hosted a couple of rounds of negotiations between Iran and Egypt at the official level in the recent months. Egypt severed ties with Iran following the 1979 Islamic Revolution during Anwar Sadat's presidency and Egypt's recognition of Israel. Khamenei's remarks indicate Iran's openness to the idea of full diplomatic relations and reopening of embassies in Tehran and Cairo.

### **Indian MoS for External Affairs visits Saudi Arabia and Bahrain**

Shri V. Muraleedharan, the Minister of State for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs of India, visited Saudi Arabia from May 1-3, 2023. During the visit, he met with Saudi Arabia's Vice

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Waleed Elkhareiji, as well as other senior Saudi officials and business community members. He also engaged with the Indian community in Riyadh and Dammam. Muraleedharan expressed India's appreciation for the Saudi Arabian leadership and government for their support in facilitating the Operation Kaveri through Jeddah to evacuate Indian nationals from Sudan. The two ministers reviewed bilateral relations, discussed mutual regional and international concerns, including the G20, and expressed satisfaction with the ongoing progress in the strategic partnership. They agreed to enhance further cooperation in various sectors such as trade, investment, energy, health, education, and culture.

During his visit to Bahrain on May 4-5, he met with several Bahraini ministers, including the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Labour, and the Minister of Social Development. They highlighted the regular exchange of ministerial visits and the robust growth in bilateral trade, which is expected to reach the US\$ 2 billion mark in the fiscal year 2022-2023. Both sides agreed to explore further areas of cooperation, particularly in technology and skill development. Regional and international issues of mutual interest were also discussed. Additionally, both sides agreed to schedule the 6<sup>th</sup> round of Foreign Office Consultations at the Secretary level soon and maintain the momentum of high-level political visits.