



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Arab League and PSIDS meeting takes place in Riyadh

The second ministerial meeting between the Arab League and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) took place on June 12, 2023, in Riyadh. The meeting aimed to strengthen cooperation between the two sides, resulting in the issuance of the Riyadh Declaration. The Declaration outlined various areas of potential collaboration. Key discussions included endorsing Saudi Arabia's bid for Expo 2030 and enhancing cooperation in diplomacy, economy, trade, investment, renewable energy, tourism, transportation, and environmental protection. The Declaration also emphasised the importance of maritime zone preservation, biodiversity, disaster response, science and technology, communication, culture, education, health, infrastructure, agriculture and people-to-people relations. Additionally, there was an agreement to work on elevating the level of diplomatic representation between both sides by encouraging the exchange of diplomatic offices. This meeting marked the second ministerial gathering since the first one took place in Abu Dhabi in June 2010.

India, France and the UAE conduct maritime partnership exercise

The trilateral cooperation between India, France and the UAE reached a significant milestone with the successful completion of the first-ever trilateral Maritime Partnership Exercise on June 7-8, 2023. During this inaugural edition of the Exercise, a wide range of naval operations were conducted including surface warfare exercises

involving tactical firing and drills for missile engagements, close-quarter manoeuvres, an advanced air defence exercise featuring French Rafale aircraft and UAE Dash 8 MPA, helicopter cross-landing operations, and drills for replenishment at sea. The exercise also facilitated the exchange of personnel, allowing for sharing of best practices between the participating units. This exercise has significantly strengthened the maritime cooperation between the three navies and improved their interoperability. It enables them to effectively address both traditional and non-traditional threats in the maritime environment, ensuring the safety of merchant trade and the freedom of navigation in the region's high seas.

India and Iraq sign comprehensive MoU to strengthen bilateral cooperation

Iraq and India signed a comprehensive MoU on June 20, 2023, to expand cooperation between the two countries across various domains. The comprehensive agreement encompasses multiple areas of cooperation, including trade, finance, energy, economy, industry, science, health, technology, agriculture, culture, consular affairs, training, expertise exchange, and other sectors serving mutual interests. Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Housing & Urban Affairs, commended the evolving Indo-Iraqi relationship, reiterated India's desire to be a significant commercial partner for Iraq, and expressed eagerness to enhance relations in all fields. Puri also highlighted the interest of Indian companies in implementing major projects in Iraq.

Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs and Oil Minister, Hayan Abdul-Ghani Abdul Zahra Al Sawad, emphasised the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation with India and welcomed Indian investment companies to operate in Iraq across all sectors. He acknowledged India's status as a crucial trade partner and a significant importer of Iraqi crude oil.

Kuwait signs US\$ 367 million deal with Turkiye's Baykar for acquisition of Bayraktar TB2 drones

Kuwait has signed a deal worth US\$ 367 million with Turkish drone manufacturer Baykar to acquire the highly sought-after Bayraktar TB2 combat drones. The TB2 drones are capable of carrying lightweight, laser-guided bombs and can stay airborne for up to 27 hours, a record set during testing in Kuwait in 2019. This agreement makes Kuwait the 28th country to procure the TB2 drones. The chief of operations for the Kuwaiti Air Force, Brigadier General Fahad Al Dosari, stated that the drone fleet would support the navy and coast guard, monitor borders, conduct reconnaissance and targeted missions, as well as aid in search and rescue operations. The drone contract between Baykar and Kuwait also includes weapons provisioning, electronic warfare capabilities, and mobile ground control facilities compatible with NATO standards.

Israel approves construction of over 5,000 housing units in the West Bank

Israel's High Planning Committee of the Defense Ministry's West Bank Civil Administration has approved plans for the construction of over 5,000 new housing

units in Israeli settlements across the West Bank, including Eli, Ma'ale Adumim, and Beitar Elit. Despite objections from the US State Department, the Benjamin Netanyahu government proceeded with the first-stage approval. A Palestinian official has stated that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories are illegitimate and illegal.

GCC and Iraq launch Electrical Interconnection Project

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Interconnection Authority and Iraq have inaugurated an electrical interconnection project to bolster energy security and promote regional cooperation. The project involves the implementation of a dual-circuit transmission line connecting Saudi Arabia's Afar city to Yusufiya in western Baghdad. The initial capacity of the interconnection is set at 1,000 megawatts, with plans for future expansion to meet the growing electricity demands in Iraq. The project is expected to stabilise markets, enhance energy security and stimulate economic growth. The electrical interconnection project also signifies a significant turning point for Iraq, allowing for long-term improvements to its electricity network, particularly in the southern region. The interconnection project represents an important step towards regional integration within the GCC.

Qatar and China sign 27-year gas supply deal

Qatar has secured a significant gas supply deal with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), marking its second major agreement with a Chinese state-

controlled company in less than a year. Under the 27-year agreement, China will purchase four million metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually from Qatar. The deal was signed between QatarEnergy and CNPC, and it also includes CNPC taking an equity stake in Qatar's North Field LNG project expansion. The stake represents five per cent of one LNG train with a capacity of eight million tonnes per year. QatarEnergy has been actively engaging with Asian buyers, and this deal marks its third agreement to supply LNG from the North Field expansion to an Asian partner.

Prime Minister Barzani of the Kurdistan Regional Government visits Turkiye

Prime Minister Masrour Barzani of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) visited Turkiye and met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on June 20, 2023. Both leaders discussed the overall situation in Iraq and the broader region. They underscored the importance of strengthening the relationship between the Kurdistan Region and Turkiye. The leaders agreed on the significance of enhancing bilateral relations and expanding opportunities for cooperation and coordination, specifically focusing on regional security and stability. They identified economy and trade fields as promising areas for collaboration.

India's National Security Advisor visits Oman

India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, undertook an official visit to Oman on June 26, 2023. The visit aimed to

strengthen the already robust bilateral relationship between India and Oman, emphasising the strategic partnership between the two. Discussions were held with key Omani officials covering key areas such as economic and technological development, mutual security, regional stability, defence, counter-terrorism and maritime security. Both sides expressed a commitment to fostering mutually beneficial cooperation that would contribute to the progress and prosperity of their respective nations.

Qatar and the UAE restore diplomatic ties

On 19 June 2023, the UAE and Qatar reopened their respective embassies in Doha and Abu Dhabi. The reopening of the respective embassies is based on the Al Ula agreement signed on January 5, 2021, by the GCC leaders. The reopening of the embassies symbolizes a significant milestone in the journey towards reconciliation and renewed cooperation. With the restoration of diplomatic relations, the reopening of borders and airspace between Qatar and other GCC countries also followed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UAE expressed that the reopening of the embassies signifies the intentions of the leadership of both nations and the promotion of unified Arab efforts to fulfil better relations. Similarly, the Qatari Foreign Ministry acknowledged the embassy's reopening as a positive step demonstrating both countries' dedication to enhancing their bilateral relations.