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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

- **Saudi Arabia hosts Middle East Green Initiative**
- **Iran agrees to resume Vienna talks**
- **FATF adds Turkey to the 'grey list'**
- **Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennett visits Russia**
- **Violent protests recur in Lebanon**
- **Iraq holds Parliamentary election**
- **Qatar holds first election to Shura Council**
- **State Emergency lifted in Egypt**
- **Saudi-Pakistan navy conduct joint exercise**
- **Syrian government and opposition forces agree to redraft constitution**
- **India's External Affairs Minister visits Israel**

Saudi Arabia hosts Middle East Green Initiative

Saudi Arabia hosted the Middle East Green Initiative in Riyadh on October 25 as an extension of the Saudi Green Initiative Forum and the Youth Green Summit. These summits aim to address the climate pledges and initiatives taken by the Kingdom. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that the Summit is the beginning of a green era and announced doubling of carbon emission reduction targets, planting of 50 billion trees and increasing the percentage of protected areas in the Kingdom to 30 per cent. Saudi Arabia also announced the establishment of an investment fund for the circular carbon economy and launched an international economic initiative to provide food for over 750 million people across the world while calling for regional programs to reduce carbon emissions. India has expressed its appreciation for the initiative taken by the Kingdom. Representing India, the Minister of Environment, Bhupender Yadav, emphasised historical responsibility, equity, national circumstances and priorities, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities to address the challenges of climate change.

Iran agrees to resume Vienna talks

After holding talks with the EU mediators, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister and chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, stated that Iran now agrees to resume negotiations on 29 November. Iran and P4+1 countries started dialogues to resume the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in April 2021. Five rounds of meetings of the Iran and P4+1 countries held in Vienna have remained inconclusive. Iran's decision

to resume the negotiations was put on hold by the new President Ebrahim Raisi. Although Iran has agreed to resume the Vienna talks, under the given situation, the future of the nuclear deal remains uncertain.

FATF adds Turkey to the 'grey list'

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), in its fifth Plenary held in Paris, has added Turkey (along with Jordan and Mali) to its list of 'jurisdictions under increased monitoring' also known as the 'grey list'. Countries in the 'grey list' of the FATF are subject to increased monitoring, and the FATF calls on these countries to complete their action plans expeditiously and within the agreed timeframes. The FATF has asked Turkey to implement an eight-point action plan which includes, among others, dedicating more resources, enhancing the use of financial intelligence, undertaking more complex money laundering investigations and prosecutions, and fully implementing a risk-based approach to supervision of non-profit organisations to prevent their abuse for terrorist financing. The Turkish Treasury called the designation "undeserved" but said it will work with the FATF to get Turkey removed from that list.

Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennett visits Russia

The Prime Minister of Israel, Naftali Bennett, made an official visit to Russia on 22 October. Bennett met with the Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi and discussed various bilateral and regional issues, especially, the developments in Syria and Iranian nuclear issue. Putin stated that while both the countries have differences over Syria, there are certain

common grounds for cooperation such as fighting against terrorism. Russia's increasing engagement in West Asia, especially its involvement in Syria and relations with Iran, makes it an important player in West Asia. Israel's ties with Russia are important due to the presence of a large number of Russian speaking Jews in Israel. Besides, Russia is involved in the negotiations for deciding the fate of the Iran nuclear deal. At a time when Iran has decided to resume talks with world powers over its nuclear programme, Bennett's visit to Russia acquires significance.

Violent protests recur in Lebanon

Lebanon witnessed fierce sectarian clashes during the protest organised by Hezbollah and Amal on October 14 against Tarek Bitar, the judge who is leading the investigation into the Beirut Port blast. The protesters accused the judge of being politically biased and demanded his resignation. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has accused Bitar of politicising the probe by charging Hezbollah supporters. Counter protests were organised by the Christian Lebanese Forces. This was the first time in decades when two groups opened fire on each other. The violent confrontation underlines the fragile sectarian situation in Lebanon which is already suffering due to the economic crisis and political uncertainty.

Iraq holds Parliamentary election

In the backdrop of worsening economic situation and governance challenges, Iraq held elections for the 329-member Council of Representatives on 10 October. This is the fifth parliamentary elections in Iraq since the end of Saddam Hussein

regime in 2003. With a 41 per cent voter turnout, the lowest since 2003, the elections underlined widespread dissatisfaction and distrust among Iraqis over the prevailing political and economic situation and crippling governance. The Sadrist bloc led by Muqtada Al Sadr secured highest number of seats (73), followed by the Taqaddum bloc led by Mohammed Al Halbousi (37). Former Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki's State of Law bloc secured 35 seats, an improvement over its previous performance. Soon after the declaration of results, the streets of Baghdad saw a gathering of protesters who demanded recounting of the votes and accused the election commission of corruption. In addition, the Independent High Election Commission received more than 1,300 complaints of mismanagement which forced the recounting of votes.

Qatar holds first election to Shura Council

Qatar held its first ever elections to the 45-member Shura Council on October 2, 2021 for electing two-thirds representatives to the House. The voter turnout in the polls was 63.05 per cent and none of the 26 female candidates secured a seat in the Council. The remaining one-third (15 members) members are appointed by the Emir. The Council is an advisory and legislative body that has the power to issue, approve and reject state policies. The Qatari Shura Council represents the country in numerous parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Arab Parliament and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, among others.

State Emergency lifted in Egypt

The Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi lifted the state emergency imposed since April 2017. Initially, the emergency was imposed for three months and was regularly extended until now. It gave the law-enforcing authorities the power to crackdown on political dissent by liberal and Islamist critics. It also allowed them to make arrests and search people's homes without warrants while curtailing the freedom of speech and assembly.

Saudi-Pakistan navies conduct joint exercise

The Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF) and the Pakistani Naval Forces (PNF) concluded the joint naval exercise, *Naseem Al Bahr 13*, in the Arabian Sea on 9 October. The exercises aimed at enhancing interoperability and operational readiness among the forces of the two countries to cater to a wide spectrum of naval warfare and maritime security operations. A Saudi Air Force F-15 aircraft participated in the missile firing drill for the first time.

Syrian government and opposition forces agree to redraft constitution

In a major breakthrough in the Syrian peace process, the Syrian government and the opposition coalition have agreed to start drafting new constitutional provisions during renewed United Nations-mandated negotiations in Geneva. The constitution drafting committee is comprised of 45 members drawn from the Syrian government, opposition forces and the civil society. It is believed that Russia has played a key role in convincing President Bashar Al Assad to show flexibility in redrafting the constitution after UN Special Envoy for

Syria, Geir Pedersen, made two visits to Moscow. This could be described as a key progress in the peace process as government's committee delegates had been resisting the idea of redrafting the constitution till now.

India's External Affairs Minister visits Israel

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar visited Israel on 17 September. The visit focused on enhancing the level of cooperation in areas such as defence, innovation, health, agriculture and green growth. One of the significant developments during the visit was the formation of a new quadrilateral economic forum among India, Israel, UAE, and the US to strengthen economic cooperation at the multilateral level. Dr. Jaishankar visited Ovda Air Base and interacted with the Indian Airforce contingent participating in the Blue Flag exercise along with other countries. Both the countries agreed to resume negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and accorded mutual recognition to each other's Covid-19 vaccination certificates. Dr. Jaishankar's meeting with the Israeli chamber of commerce and the innovation ecosystem highlighted strong willingness on both sides to deepen cooperation in innovation.