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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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### **Saudi Foreign Minister visits India**

Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, was in India on a three-day visit during September 18-20. Prince Faisal called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed ways to enhance bilateral ties, including Saudi investment in energy, information and technology, and the defence manufacturing sector. Prince Faisal also met with his Indian counterpart Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The two ministers reviewed the implementation of the Strategic Partnership Council Agreement and discussed further steps to strengthen the bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, energy, defence, security, culture, consular issues, health care, and human resources. Dr. Jaishankar appreciated Saudi Arabia's support to the Indian community during the COVID-19 pandemic while urging to further relax restrictions on travel from India.

### **India and Kuwait hold Joint Working Group meeting**

The seventh meeting of the India-Kuwait Joint Working Group on Labour, Employment, and Development of Manpower took place virtually on September 7, 2021. The Indian and Kuwaiti delegations were led by Abbagani Ramu, Joint Secretary (Overseas Indian Affairs), and Mishal Ibrahim Al Mudhaf, Assistant Foreign Minister for Consulate Affairs, respectively. Both countries reviewed issues in the realm of manpower and labour cooperation. Additionally, they recognised the need for faster implementation of the MoU on Cooperation on Recruitment of Domestic Sector Workers signed during the visit of Dr. Jaishankar to Kuwait in June 2021.

### **MoS External Affairs visits Bahrain**

The Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan visited Bahrain on August 30, 2021, and met Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani. During the visit, the outcomes of the ministerial meeting of the Joint Higher Committee between India and Bahrain, held in April, were reviewed. Further, the need for continued high-level periodic consultations was emphasized. Muraleedharan also addressed a community event to mark *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*.

### **Indian Navy Chief visits Oman**

The Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Karambir Singh visited Oman during September 27-29, 2021. He met with his Omani counterpart Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen Al Rahbi and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the exchange of white shipping information. Admiral Singh also visited some important defence installations. The visit highlights the growing India-Oman naval cooperation.

### **UAE seeks US\$100 billion non-oil trade with India**

UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Thani Al Zeyoudi, visited India on September 22, 2021, and held talks with the Minister of Commerce & Industry and Textiles, Piyush Goyal exploring the ways to doubling the non-oil trade in textiles, jewellery, medical equipment, fintech, and petrochemicals. UAE seeks to have a US\$100 billion non-oil trade with India and intends to conclude the negotiations in this regard by December 2021.

## **India and Egypt conduct Joint Naval Exercise**

India and Egypt conducted a joint naval exercise in the Mediterranean Sea on September 5, 2021. The Indian Navy Ship Tabar participated in the exercise along with the Egyptian Navy Ship Alexandria which is a frontline frigate of the Egyptian Navy. Several naval operations were conducted including drills for transit through asymmetric threat environments, operations for interdicting suspect vessels at sea, communication procedures, joint development of maritime domain picture, and replenishment at sea drills.

## **Abu Dhabi Crown Prince visits France and UK**

Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of UAE's Armed Forces, visited France and UK as part of his Europe tour. He met the French President, Emmanuel Macron on September 15, 2021, and agreed on broadening the partnership in new areas, such as health. They decided to cooperate with the UN and announced shared support for multilateral health initiatives. With regards to Afghanistan, both shared concerns over the rights of women and girls, minorities, and resuming the COVID-19 vaccinations. They also highlighted the significance of the Abraham Accords in upholding peace and coexistence in West Asia and reaffirmed their determination to continue the fight against terrorism and radicalization. The Crown Prince also met with UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and discussed the bilateral strategic partnership between the two countries. The two leaders agreed to establish a partnership for the future based on driving sustainable prosperity and addressing global issues.

## **Israeli Prime Minister visits Egypt**

Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett visited Egypt on September 13, 2021, marking the first visit of an Israeli prime minister to Cairo in decades. During the visit, Bennett discussed a range of issues including possible ways to further deepen bilateral ties, especially economic ties and ways to revive the Israel-Palestine peace process. Bennett appreciated the Egyptian efforts to maintain stability in the Gaza Strip and help Israel in finding a solution to the issue of its captives with Hamas.

## **Israeli Foreign Minister Lapid visits Bahrain**

The Foreign Minister of Israel, Yair Lapid, visited Bahrain on September 30, 2021. The visit holds significance as it marks the first ever visit by an Israeli foreign minister to the Gulf kingdom. During the visit, Lapid called on King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and held a meeting with his Bahraini counterpart Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani. He also inaugurated the Israeli embassy in Manama. In addition to strengthen bilateral ties, Lapid toured the Bahrain-based headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet and visited the USS Pearl Harbor, currently located in Bahrain.

## **New Government formed in Lebanon**

After a 13-month stalemate, a new government has been formed in Lebanon. Led by Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the new government comprises a mix of technocrats and leaders backed by the Christian, Shia, Sunni, and Druze communities. Lebanon was under pressure from international donors to form a government capable of dealing with widespread corruption. According to Mikati, the government is formed for a

short time as Lebanon will go to parliamentary elections in May 2022.

### **US Congress approves US\$1 billion for Israel's Iron Dome program**

The US House of Representatives approved US\$1 billion funds for Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system. Initially, members of the Democratic Party sought to put the funding for the system in legislation but it was removed after the objection by a group of members. Thereafter, a separate stand-alone bill was moved which was passed with an overwhelming majority of 420-9 votes.

### **Iran would need time to return to the Vienna negotiations, says Abdollahian**

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has stated that the new Iranian government will need two-to-three months before it can return to the Vienna negotiations since it needs time to reach an internal consensus regarding its approach to the nuclear deal. This might also be because of the logistical consideration given the speculation that the negotiating team will shift from the foreign ministry to the Supreme National Security Council. Meanwhile, the US officials have stated that they are awaiting official confirmation from the Iranian side to discuss the resumption of the Vienna talks.

### **IAEA Director visits Iran**

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director Rafael Grossi visited Tehran on September 11, 2021, in an attempt to salvage the nuclear monitoring mission in Iran. He aimed to convince the Iranian officials to allow IAEA to install new memory cards in its on-site cameras, allowing them to continue operating. Iran has agreed to allow the cameras to keep

recording with the understanding that the IAEA could review them if there's an agreement on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal.

### **149th Session of the GCC Ministerial Council held in Riyadh**

The 149<sup>th</sup> session of the GCC Ministerial Council was held in Riyadh on September 16, 2021. The session discussed various reports including the implementation of the Al Ula Declaration. The GCC members reiterated support for Yemeni legitimacy, Iraqi sovereignty and voiced concern for the Afghan people during the session.

### **Prime Minister of Iraq visits Iran**

The Prime Minister of Iraq, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, visited Iran on September 12, 2021. He became the first foreign leader to visit and meet Ebrahim Raisi since the latter took charge of the presidency. Kadhimi expressed a desire to expand trade with Iran. The major issues of discussion during the meeting were economic and strategic projects, particularly energy cooperation, a joint railway project as well as expansion in bilateral relations.