



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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UNSC passes resolution for immediate ceasefire in Gaza

On 25 March 2024, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 2728, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The Resolution, tabled by ten non-permanent members, received overwhelming support with 14 votes in favour and abstention from the United States. The Resolution demands the unconditional release of the Israeli hostages and emphasised the urgent need for increased humanitarian aid to Gaza. However, Israel's ambassador criticised the resolution for its failure to condemn Hamas. The ambassador for the observer State of Palestine expressed hope that it would mark a turning point in the region's peace efforts.

6th Qatar-US Strategic Dialogue takes place in Washington

On 5 March 2024, the 6th Qatar-US Strategic Dialogue took place in Washington D.C., with Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken leading the discussions. The dialogue emphasised the longstanding relationship between the two nations, spanning economic, security and technological cooperation. Key outcomes included amendments to the Defence Cooperation Agreement, agreements on biometric data-sharing and the establishment of an "American Corner" in Qatar. Discussions also touched on global issues such as humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism efforts and regional stability, including efforts to address crises in Afghanistan, Venezuela, Gaza, Yemen, Ukraine and the Horn of Africa. Both sides committed to strengthening ties and cooperation across various sectors, including defence

infrastructure, trade and investment, education and culture, combating terrorism and human trafficking.

Turkiye and GCC signs deal to negotiate FTA

On 21 March 2024, Turkiye and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) signed a deal to commence negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This move reflects Ankara's intensified efforts to bolster economic relations with the Gulf region. Following years of strained relations, Turkiye embarked on a diplomatic campaign in 2020 to mend ties with Gulf nations, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Ankara has already signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the UAE. Turkish Minister of Trade Omer Bolat anticipates the FTA will create one of the world's largest free trade areas, valued at US\$ 2.4 trillion, encompassing Turkiye and GCC member states. GCC Secretary General Jasem Al Budaiwi hailed the agreement as a testament to the strong partnership between GCC countries and Turkiye, highlighting successful cooperation in commerce, economics and finance. As relations flourish, Gulf nations seek Turkiye's support in industrial development and technology transfer to diversify their economies beyond oil.

Iraq bans Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been banned by the Iraq National Security Council, as announced in a joint statement issued after a high-level security meeting held in Baghdad on 14 March 2024. A meeting was held between foreign and defence ministers of Turkiye and Iraq. Turkiye has welcomed this decision, as the PKK has been conducting an armed

campaign against Turkish forces for Kurdish self-rule within Turkiye. The PKK, recognised as a terrorist organisation by Ankara, Washington and the European Union, operates from northern Iraqi Kurdistan, where Turkiye conducts airstrikes and maintains military outposts. The move signifies a closer alignment between Turkiye and Iraq on counterterrorism efforts, as both countries agreed to jointly combat PKK actions and establish joint committees in various fields, including counterterrorism, trade, agriculture, energy, water, health and transportation.

IAEA holds discussion with Iraq for nuclear energy programme

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi held discussions with Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani and other senior government leaders in Baghdad on 18 March 2024 regarding Iraq's potential nuclear energy programme, particularly focusing on small modular reactors while ensuring strict adherence to non-proliferation norms. Grossi announced increased support for cancer care under the IAEA's Rays of Hope scheme, aimed at bridging the gap in cancer treatment in lower and middle-income countries, including Iraq. Additionally, the IAEA is intensifying assistance for Iraq in decommissioning and remediating contaminated sites, with a focus on environmental safety and compliance with international standards. Since 2007, Iraq has participated in 13 technical cooperation projects with the IAEA. These projects aim to enhance nuclear safety, develop regulatory frameworks and improve radioactive waste management within the country.

Extraordinary Session of OIC Foreign Ministers takes place at Jeddah

In an extraordinary session convened by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on 5 March 2024, member states vehemently condemned escalating Israeli aggression against Palestinians. The meeting, held in Jeddah at the request of Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Jordan and Iran, reiterated support for Palestinian rights, including self-determination and the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. The OIC called for immediate action to halt the violence, ensure humanitarian aid access and hold Israel accountable. The session emphasised legal actions against Israeli occupation and urged international pressure to end the crisis.

159th Session of GCC Ministerial Council takes place in Riyadh

The GCC Ministerial Council held its 159th session on 3 March 2024 in Riyadh. The meeting condemned the Israeli aggression in Gaza and called for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access. The Council expressed concerns over Iran's nuclear programme and reiterated its positions on the disputed islands in the Persian Gulf. On regional issues, the GCC backed efforts for a political solution in Yemen based on the GCC Initiative, supported Iraq's sovereignty and combating terrorism and called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Libya. The Council affirmed solidarity with Egypt and Sudan on the Nile dam issue. The ministers welcomed the Saudi-UAE prisoner swap mediation between Russia and Ukraine. They also praised outcomes like the UAE hosting COP28 on climate action and Qatar's support for startups and the 2023 Asian Cup win.