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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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First India-GCC Joint Ministerial Meeting

Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, visited Riyadh from September 8-9, 2024, to co-chair the first-ever India-GCC Joint Ministerial Meeting for Strategic Dialogue with Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister. The meeting, attended by GCC Foreign Ministers, reaffirmed the commitment to strengthening India-GCC ties, particularly in areas such as trade, investment, infrastructure development and people-to-people ties. A Joint Action Plan for 2024-2028 was adopted, covering diverse sectors like health, trade, security, agriculture, food security, energy and culture. Dr. Jaishankar underscored the strategic importance of the India-GCC partnership in fostering regional and global stability. He also held bilateral meetings with foreign ministers of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain to discuss collaboration.

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi visits India

Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, visited India from September 9-10, 2024, marking his first official visit in this capacity. He called on President Smt. Droupadi Murmu to discuss warm, historic and comprehensive bilateral ties and the welfare of 3.5 million Indians in the UAE. Crown Prince also held bilateral talks with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, where both leaders expressed satisfaction with the progress of the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. They discussed expanding collaboration in areas like nuclear energy, green hydrogen, artificial intelligence and critical minerals. Several MoUs were signed, including

agreements on nuclear cooperation, LNG supply and food park development in Gujarat. The nuclear cooperation agreement aims to enhance collaboration in power plant operations and investment. The Crown Prince also visited Mumbai to participate in an India-UAE Business Forum to launch initiatives like the India-UAE Virtual Trade Corridor (VTC) and the MAITRI interface to boost bilateral trade.

US declares UAE as a major defence partner

On 23 September 2024, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE visited the US and met with President Joe Biden. They reaffirmed the enduring US-UAE strategic and defence partnership, with discussions centering on deepening cooperation in advanced technology, investments and regional matters. Both leaders pledged to pursue new opportunities to strengthen their economic and defence ties while promoting peace and stability across the West Asia region. President Biden designated the UAE as a Major Defence Partner, allowing for enhanced joint military exercises and cooperation. The joint statement specified partnerships in cyberspace and space exploration along with strengthening critical infrastructure and supply chain resilience.

Saudi Arabia announces 'Global Alliance for the Implementation of the two-state solution'

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York, in the ministerial meeting on the Palestinian cause, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud announced the formation of a "Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution." The coalition includes several Arab, Muslim and European countries. Prince Faisal stated

that “Implementing the two-state solution is the best way to break the cycle of conflict and suffering, creating a new reality where the entire region, including Israel, can enjoy security and coexistence.” While expressing his appreciation for the countries that have recently recognised Palestine, he urged all other countries to make the same decision.

UNGA adopts resolution to end ‘unlawful presence’ of Israel

The UN General Assembly passed a Palestinian-drafted, non-binding resolution that demands that Israel “brings to an end without delay its unlawful presence” in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The resolution recorded votes of 124 nations in favour, 14 against and 43 abstentions (including India), urging Israel to comply with international law by withdrawing military forces, halting new settlement activities, evacuating settlers and dismantling parts of the separation wall in the occupied West Bank. The resolution also calls for the return of land and immovable property seized since the 1967 occupation, along with cultural assets taken from Palestinians. It demands the right of return for displaced Palestinians and reparations for damages caused by the occupation. The Palestinian ambassador called the vote a turning point “in our struggle for freedom and justice,” but his Israeli counterpart denounced it as “diplomatic terrorism”.

UK suspends Arms Export Licenses to Israel

On 2 September 2024, the UK government announced the immediate suspension of around 30 arms export licenses to Israel, following a review of Israel’s compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL). The decision, led by the Foreign,

Commonwealth & Development Office, comes after concerns that certain military exports to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) might be used in violations of IHL during military operations in Gaza. While the suspension affects components for military aircraft, helicopters, drones and ground targeting equipment, other non-military items and exports unrelated to the Gaza conflict remain unaffected.

ADNOC signs 15-year LNG supply deal with Indian Oil Corporation

On 9 September 2024, the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) announced a 15-year agreement to supply one million metric tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC). The LNG will primarily come from ADNOC’s Ruwais LNG project, which is expected to begin production in late 2028. The Ruwais project, powered by clean energy, will consist of two plants producing 4.8 million tons per annum (mtpa) of LNG, more than doubling ADNOC’s total LNG capacity to 15 mtpa. ADNOC’s growing focus on LNG, renewable energy and petrochemicals aims to position it as a competitive player alongside regional giants like Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

New government formed in Syria

On 23 September 2024, Syrian President Bashar Al Assad issued a presidential decree announcing the formation of a new government. Mohammed Ghazi Jalali, former communications minister, has been appointed as the new prime minister of the country. Jalali, 55, has been under EU sanctions since 2014 for “his responsibility for the regime’s violent repression of the civilian population”. Bassam Al Sabbagh, former deputy foreign minister, was appointed as the new foreign minister,

replacing Faisal Mekdad, who has been named vice president with responsibilities for foreign and media policy. Ziad Ghossoun, former Director General of the Al Wahda Printing and Publishing Organisation, was appointed as the new information minister.

Islamic Action Front makes significant gains in Jordan's parliamentary elections

The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, made significant strides in Jordan's parliamentary elections held on 10 September 2024, securing 31 out of 138 seats, up from just seven in the previous parliament. Nearly 1.5 million voters, representing a 31 per cent turnout, participated in the elections under the country's new party and electoral laws. The reforms, initiated by King Abdullah II in 2021, introduced a dual-vote system, allowing voters to cast one ballot for nationwide party lists and another for local lists. Despite the goal of increasing political party representation, of the 38 approved parties, only 10 secured parliamentary seats, with newly formed parties failing to make significant headway. The elections marked a pivotal moment in Jordan's political modernisation efforts, highlighting the growing influence of the IAF.

Turkiye attends Arab League ministerial meeting for the first time since 2011

Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan attended the 162nd session of the Arab League's Council of Foreign Ministers in Cairo on 10 September 2024, marking the first Turkish participation since 2011. The invitation followed recent diplomatic efforts, including Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi's visit to Türkiye and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's trip to

Cairo earlier in the year. In a mark of protest, the Syrian delegation left the meeting room when Fidan made his speech. During the past few years, Türkiye has repaired its ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia and engaged to normalise relations with Syrian President Bashar Al Assad.

Israel-Hezbollah escalation

On 27 September, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah was killed in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut. Earlier, Israeli strikes in Beirut killed several senior commanders of Hezbollah including Ibrahim Aqil, head of operations for Hezbollah and Ibrahim Qubaisi, head of the missile and rocket force as cross-border rocket attacks between Israel and Hezbollah intensified. According to Israel Defence Forces, Hezbollah has fired more than 700 rockets in one week. Israel targeted Hezbollah's communication devices across the country which resulted in 569 deaths, including 50 children and injured 1,835 people.

GCC Foreign Ministers meeting takes place in Riyadh

On 9 September 2024, the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) convened the 161st ministerial council meeting in Riyadh, urging the UN Security Council to enact a Chapter Seven decision compelling Israel to ceasefire in Gaza and end the displacement of Palestinians. They emphasised the centrality of the Palestinian cause and called for international recognition of Palestine and the deployment of UN peacekeepers. The ministers condemned Israeli actions in Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank, deeming them war crimes and demanded humanitarian aid for Gaza. They supported mediation efforts for a ceasefire and reaffirmed solidarity with Egypt, opposing Israeli provocations.