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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Situation in the Strait of Hormuz

In April 2026, global oil markets experienced sharp volatility following Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude opened near US\$ 104 per barrel on 1 April 2026, rising to about US\$ 110 by 7 April amid supply concerns. After the breakdown of the Islamabad talks, President Donald Trump imposed a full US naval blockade on 13 April, keeping oil prices above US \$100 in mid-April. The oil prices plunged to US\$ 90.38 on 17 April after Iran signaled a reopening of the Strait, but rebounded to US\$ 109.34 by late April. Shipping traffic fell drastically from 130–140 vessels daily prior to the conflict to just a few dozen. US Central Command redirected 28 vessels and detained a few, though at least 34 Iran-linked tankers bypassed the blockade. On 18 April, New Delhi summoned Iran's Ambassador Mohammad Fathali after two Indian ships faced a shooting incident in the Strait of Hormuz. On 23 April, India confirmed the presence of 14 Indian ships in the region.

Iran-US ceasefire

On 8 April 2026, the US and Iran agreed to an initial two-week ceasefire mediated by Pakistan. Tehran's 10-point plan seeks sanctions relief, access to frozen assets, recognition of nuclear enrichment, control over the Strait of Hormuz and US military withdrawal from the region. The US treats it as a preliminary framework. The Islamabad Talks ended without agreement. Key sticking points included the nuclear programme, with the US demanding a complete halt to uranium enrichment. Iran

rejected the US stance as excessive while asserting civilian rights. Disputes also covered navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, sanctions relief, and whether the ceasefire extended to Israel-Hezbollah hostilities. On 21 April, US President Donald Trump extended the ceasefire indefinitely to allow a "unified proposal from the Iranian leadership". On 25 April, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner's visit was cancelled for the second round, citing lengthy travel time and lack of direct Iranian engagement.

EAM Jaishankar visits UAE

From 11 to 12 April 2026, India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited the UAE and held meetings with the UAE leadership to review bilateral cooperation and further strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. The discussions focused on expanding collaboration across strategic sectors and sustaining close coordination amid a challenging regional environment. During the visit, Jaishankar highlighted the resilience of the India-UAE strategic partnership, noting that bilateral dialogue remained robust, transparent, and forward-looking despite evolving geopolitical developments in West Asia, reaffirming the shared commitment of both countries to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation.

India's Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas visits Doha

On 9-10 April 2026, India's Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, visited Doha and held talks with his Qatar's Energy Minister, Saad Sherida Al Kaabi, during which Qatar reaffirmed its

commitment to strengthening energy ties with India. Discussions covered bilateral cooperation across energy, trade, and investment, alongside regional stability concerns following disruptions caused by tensions involving Iran. Qatar, which accounts for nearly 45 per cent of India's LNG imports, remained a critical energy partner despite recent supply challenges, with both sides emphasising continued collaboration to ensure energy security and sustain long-term strategic engagement.

Pakistan deploys fighter jets to Saudi Arabia

On 11 April 2026, Pakistan deployed fighter jets and military assets to Saudi Arabia under a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed in September 2025. The Saudi Defence Ministry stated that the aircraft arrived at King Abdulaziz Air Base to enhance joint defence cooperation amid rising regional tensions. The deployment followed recent attacks linked to Iran that targeted critical infrastructure in the Kingdom. Both sides described the move as part of efforts to bolster regional and international security, reflecting the deepening strategic and military partnership between Islamabad and Riyadh.

Further, Saudi Arabia pledged an additional US\$ 3 billion in financial assistance to Pakistan and agreed to extend its existing US\$ 5 billion deposit beyond earlier rollover terms. The support is aimed at stabilising Pakistan's external account and boosting foreign exchange reserves amid repayment pressures from the UAE, reflecting continued Saudi backing for Islamabad's economic stability and ongoing financing commitments.

Iraq-Syria Border crossing reopens after more than a decade

On 20 April 2026, a key border crossing between Iraq and Syria reopened after more than a decade, marking a significant step toward restoring trade and connectivity. The Rabia-Yarubiyah crossing, closed since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and later seized by ISIS in 2014, was recaptured by Iraqi Kurdish forces before its reopening. The crossing has potential to facilitate trade and provide an alternative overland route for oil exports amid regional tensions affecting the Strait of Hormuz, though limitations in capacity compared to maritime routes persist.

Rehabilitation of Gaza

The Gaza "Board of Peace" held talks with DP World in the third week of April on managing supply chains and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. The rebuilding process in Gaza is estimated at US\$ 70 billion. Discussions focused on aid logistics, including warehousing, tracking, and security, alongside proposals for a new port in Gaza or nearby Egypt and a free-trade zone. The plan envisions a "secure and traceable supply chain system" and a port-led economic ecosystem to support jobs and light industry. The Board of Peace plan in early April proposed Hamas disarmament, tunnel destruction and a US-backed technocratic authority, followed by Israeli withdrawal. Hamas rejected the disarmament demands, citing Israel's continued ceasefire violations.

Israel-Lebanon ceasefire

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict, which began on 2 March 2026, escalated

significantly in April 2026. The IDF expanded its security presence in southern Lebanon to maintain a buffer zone, destroying villages and triggering large-scale evacuations. Shortly after the US–Iran ceasefire announcement, a massive Israeli airstrike campaign on 8 April killed over 300 people, despite the broader ceasefire context. On 14 April 2026, Israel and Lebanon held their first direct talks since 1993 in Washington DC, chaired by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, to address the escalating conflict. Hezbollah strongly opposed the negotiations and rejected any move toward disarmament. Although a 10-day truce began on 16 April, Israeli strikes and Hezbollah rocket and drone attacks on IDF ground forces in southern Lebanon continued, resulting in deaths of around 36 Lebanese citizens till 27 April. Following a second round of talks on 23 April in Washington DC, Trump announced a three-week extension of the ceasefire.

BRICS MENA meeting held in New Delhi

The BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) met in New Delhi to review the evolving situation in the MENA region. The discussions reflected deep concern over ongoing regional conflicts and covered issues including the Palestine question, the Gaza situation, humanitarian assistance and the role of UNRWA. Participants also addressed developments in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Sudan, emphasising political dialogue, reconstruction, and stability. The meeting underscored a collective commitment to

conflict management and agreed to continue consultations under China’s chairship in 2027.

UAE announces exit from OPEC

The UAE has announced it would withdraw from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) effective 1 May 2026, ending over five decades of membership to adopt an independent production strategy. The decision was described by Suhail Al Mazrouei, UAE Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, as aligned with long-term market fundamentals and national interests. Officials indicated the move would enhance flexibility in managing output amid global supply disruptions linked to the Iran conflict, positioning the UAE to respond more effectively to evolving energy market dynamics.

GCC Consultative Summit takes place in Jeddah

A consultative summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to address the regional crisis triggered by the US–Israel war on Iran. The summit focused on coordinating a unified response against shared security vulnerabilities following Iranian attacks on Gulf energy and civilian infrastructure. The Gulf leaders stressed the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, suggesting that any Iran-US deal over the waterway should result in a permanent, long-term arrangement. The Gulf States emphasised the need for a durable, long-term settlement rather than a temporary ceasefire, warning against a “frozen conflict” that could reignite periodically.