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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Prime Minister Modi visits UAE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the UAE on 15 May 2026 and held talks with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on further strengthening bilateral strategic cooperation. Both sides signed agreements on energy security, defence, maritime infrastructure, artificial intelligence and investment. Key outcomes included cooperation between Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company on strategic petroleum reserves and LPG supplies, a defence partnership framework and maritime projects involving Cochin Shipyard Limited and Drydocks World. The visit also advanced collaboration on AI supercomputing between CDAC and G42. The agreements reinforced India-UAE cooperation in energy resilience, technological innovation, connectivity and long-term economic growth.

BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting held in New Delhi

Foreign ministers of the BRICS member states met in New Delhi and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening multilateralism, reforming global governance institutions and enhancing cooperation under the BRICS framework. The ministers supported India's 2026 BRICS Chairship theme, "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability," and emphasised collaboration in trade, energy security, climate action, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, and counter-terrorism. They called for comprehensive

reform of the United Nations Security Council and greater representation of developing countries in global decision-making institutions. The meeting also addressed regional crises in West Asia, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine, while reiterating support for dialogue, diplomacy and humanitarian access. The ministers strongly condemned terrorism, including the April 2025 attack in Jammu and Kashmir, and stressed the importance of coordinated global efforts against extremism and terror financing.

Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides visits India

India and Cyprus elevated their bilateral Comprehensive Partnership to a Strategic Partnership during the state visit of Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides to India from 20–23 May 2026. During talks in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Christodoulides reviewed progress under the India-Cyprus Joint Action Plan 2025–2029 and agreed to deepen cooperation in defence, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, trade, maritime connectivity, education, innovation and emerging technologies with the signing of several MoUs. Both sides condemned terrorism in all its forms and welcomed the establishment of a Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism and a Cybersecurity Dialogue. The leaders also supported stronger India-EU cooperation, the implementation of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, and the expansion of connectivity initiatives, including the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

Iran-US talks

On 7 May, Iran accused the US of an “egregious ceasefire violation” after the latter’s navy destroyers struck two Iranian vessels and alleged civilian sites near the Strait of Hormuz, which CENTCOM described as self-defence operations. On 11 May, President Donald Trump warned that the ceasefire was on “life support” while continuing diplomatic backchannels and cautioning mediators against supporting toll systems in the Strait. On 26 May, the ceasefire deteriorated further after CENTCOM launched defensive strikes against missile sites and naval mine-laying boats in southern Iran, prompting strong Iranian condemnation. On 27 May, Iran retaliated by targeting a US airbase in Kuwait. Both sides continued accusing each other of violating the existing truce.

Situation in the Strait of Hormuz

In early May, commercial shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz remained vulnerable after South Korea stated that an Iranian missile was likely responsible for the 4 May strike on a bulk carrier. The Iranian Navy seized and redirected a foreign oil tanker in the Sea of Oman over alleged fuel smuggling, while US forces conducted deterrence strikes to protect shipping lanes. Between 17–19 May, US pressure on Iran-linked shadow fleets intensified after US forces boarded an Iranian-linked tanker, while the Philippines received a crude cargo shipment. The IRGC announced that all transits through the strait required prior coordination with the Iranian Navy. On 25 May, CENTCOM launched

strikes on Iranian missile sites and naval boats.

Israel-Hezbollah Conflict

Despite the 16 April ceasefire and two rounds of Israel-Lebanon talks, hostilities between the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah continued. On 14–15 May, Israeli and Lebanese delegations held a third round of direct talks in Washington DC, after which both sides agreed to extend the ceasefire by 45 days to prevent wider escalation and sustain negotiations. Discussions focused on Israeli military withdrawal, deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon, and Hezbollah’s disarmament. For the first time, military officials from both sides participated, paving the way for a Pentagon-facilitated security track on border arrangements. Despite diplomatic progress, Hezbollah continued UAV and anti-tank missile attacks against Israeli positions in south Lebanon and northern Israel. Meanwhile, the IDF expanded the combat zone in southern Lebanon and prepared for possible ground operations north of the Litani River.

Developments in Gaza

IDF intensified operations in Gaza, killing successive chiefs of Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Izz al-Din al-Haddad on 15 May and Mohammed Odeh on 26 May. On 28 May, Israeli strikes killed Hamas commanders Imad Aslim and Izz ad-Din Beck, senior financier Ibad Khrizim, and weapons production head Muhammad al-Habash. Meanwhile, Donald Trump’s Board of Peace reportedly received no

funding despite US\$ 17 billion in pledges, delaying Gaza reconstruction amid financial and operational constraints. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated on 28 May that Israel, which controls 60 percent of Gaza, aims to expand its hold beyond 70 percent, surpassing limits envisaged under the October 2025 ceasefire. Hamas has rejected disarmament, while Israeli-backed anti-Hamas militias expanded operational capabilities, including drone deployment.

UK concludes FTA with the Gulf Cooperation Council

The United Kingdom concluded a Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council on 20 May 2026. The UK Trade Minister Chris Bryant stated that the agreement would strengthen economic resilience, expand trade, and deepen long-term strategic cooperation. The deal is expected to increase UK-GCC trade by nearly 20 per cent and add £3.7 billion annually to the UK economy in the long term. It includes tariff reductions, improved market access for services, digital trade provisions, investment protections, and enhanced business mobility arrangements. The agreement also covers cooperation in technology, clean energy, supply chains, and infrastructure, while including commitments on labour standards, women's economic empowerment, environmental cooperation, and animal welfare.

UN Security Council condemns drone attack near UAE nuclear plant

On 26 May 2026, the United Nations Security Council condemned a drone

attack near the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in the UAE, describing it as a serious threat to civilian lives, critical infrastructure, and nuclear safety. The strike, which occurred on 17 May 2026, targeted an electricity generator outside the plant's inner perimeter. Without directly naming any country, Security Council members called the incident a "flagrant violation of international law" and warned against attacks on civilian nuclear facilities. Rafael Mariano Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, also expressed grave concern and stressed that military actions endangering nuclear safety were unacceptable.

UN welcomes Yemen detainee exchange agreement

The United Nations welcomed an agreement between the Yemeni government and the Houthis to release more than 1,600 conflict-related detainees, marking the largest such exchange since the beginning of the Yemen conflict. UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged both sides to swiftly implement the agreement in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross so families could reunite quickly. The agreement is the result of weeks of direct negotiations in Amman, Jordan, under the auspices of the UN. The UN also called for further releases of detainees under the 2018 Stockholm Agreement and encouraged all parties to engage constructively in an inclusive political process for lasting peace in Yemen.