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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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### **Continuing Israel-Iran escalation**

Israel's war against Hezbollah and Hamas continues to escalate, and as a result, the Israel-Iran tension continues to intensify. On 20 October 2024, a drone from Lebanon targeted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's house. Notably, on 2 October, Iran launched approximately 180 missiles into Israel. Iran fired these missiles in retaliation for attacks that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Revolutionary Guard Brigadier General Abbas Nilforushan and Ismail Haniyeh, a top leader of Hamas. According to the Israel Defence Forces, on 26 October, it conducted precision strikes on several military targets in Iran, including multiple missile manufacturing facilities, several surface-to-air missile arrays and other Iranian aerial capabilities.

### **Israeli Knesset approves laws banning UNRWA**

On 28 October 2024, the Israeli Knesset passed two bills to restrict the UN agency UNRWA's operations in Israel and Palestinian territories, raising humanitarian concerns. One bill bans UNRWA from working within Israel, while another prohibits Israeli authorities from coordinating with the agency in Gaza and the West Bank, cutting access for essential services provided to Palestinian refugees. These changes will restrict UNRWA's ability to offer food, healthcare and education to millions of Palestinians, especially in Gaza. UNRWA condemned the legislation, calling it a violation of the UN Charter and international law. UNRWA Spokeswoman Juliette Touma argued that dismantling the Agency would worsen Gaza's humanitarian crisis, where living conditions are already dire, and increase suffering among Palestinians relying on its aid.

### **Iran, Russia and Oman conduct joint naval exercise**

Iran hosted the "IMEX 2024" naval drills in the Indian Ocean, starting on 19 October 2024, with Russia and Oman participating and other nations as observers, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Thailand. Intended to bolster collective security in the region, the exercise aims to protect maritime routes and enhance multilateral coordination in maritime security and humanitarian efforts. The exercise comes amid heightened regional tensions due to the Israel-Hamas war and tension in the Red Sea hostilities. Iran had also conducted a military exercise with Russia and China in the Gulf of Oman in March 2024.

### **First EU-GCC Summit takes place in Brussels**

On 16 October 2024, the EU and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders convened their first summit in Brussels, focusing on building a "Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity." Co-chaired by European Council President Charles Michel and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, discussions highlighted commitments to regional security, sustainable energy cooperation, digital advancement and people-to-people exchanges. They pledged to explore a regional free trade agreement, develop resilient energy supplies and enhance climate action in anticipation of COP29. They condemned recent West Asian and European conflicts, urging humanitarian aid and ceasefires in Gaza, Lebanon and Ukraine while supporting UN principles. The EU and GCC plan biennial summits, with the next scheduled in Saudi Arabia in 2026.

### **First Ministerial Council of Middle East Green Initiative takes place in Jeddah**

The first session of the Ministerial Council of the Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) was convened in Jeddah with representatives from 29 countries and international organisations on 16 October 2024. The council reaffirmed the significance of regional cooperation in combating environmental issues like desertification, drought and climate change across the Middle East and North Africa. The council approved the MGI secretariat's structure and appointed key leaders to initiate implementation. New regional members joined and the UK participated as a non-regional observer, encouraging international support for MGI's objectives. In line with multilateral environmental goals, the council stressed setting national targets for land rehabilitation and vegetation growth and called for private sector involvement. Additionally, the council acknowledged Saudi Arabia's leadership in environmental diplomacy, hosting major events such as World Environment Day 2024 and preparing for the UNCCD's upcoming COP16 in Riyadh.

### **Terror attack in Turkey**

On 23 October 2024, two armed attackers launched a deadly assault at Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAS) in Ankara, killing five and injuring 22 people. Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya confirmed the assailants' deaths and said two critically injured victims remained hospitalized. Initial investigations suggested the attackers were linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Turkish air forces responded by striking PKK targets in northern Iraq and Syria, destroying several sites. The incident temporarily forced TUSAS employees into shelters, halting operations at Turkey's premier aerospace

manufacturer, which is crucial for its national defence projects.

### **India-Oman naval exercise *Naseem Al Bahr* takes place off Goa**

The India-Oman bilateral naval exercise, *Naseem Al Bahr*, took place off the Goa coast from 13-18 October 2024, featuring INS Trikand, the Dornier Maritime Patrol Aircraft and the Royal Navy of Oman's vessel Al Seeb. Conducted in two phases, the exercise began with a harbour phase involving professional exchanges, sports events and social gatherings. In the sea phase, ships executed gun firings, anti-aircraft drills, complex manoeuvres and Replenishment at Sea Approaches (RASAPS). INS Trikand's helicopter performed cross-deck landings with RNOV Al Seeb, while India's Dornier aircraft provided Over-the-Horizon Targeting (OTHT) support. Successfully fostering interoperability and shared practices, the exercise reinforced India's collaborative security stance in the Indian Ocean Region.

### **Indian Chief of Naval Staff visits the UAE**

Indian Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi visited the UAE from 21-24 October 2024 to enhance defence cooperation under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. The visit focused on reinforcing maritime ties and exploring further collaboration opportunities between the two navies. Admiral Tripathi met with Rear Admiral Pilot Saeed Bin Hamdan Al Nahyan, Commander of the UAE Naval Forces and other UAE senior officials. He also visited the UAE National Defence College, engaging with Student Officers and observed the third Edition of the India-UAE Bilateral Naval Exercise. The Indian and UAE navies engage regularly through port

calls, bilateral exercises, staff talks and Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meetings.

### **UAE signs MoU on renewable energy with Rajasthan**

The UAE signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Rajasthan government for a substantial investment of Rs 3 lakh crore in renewable energy. The agreement was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma and the UAE Investment Minister Mohammad Hassan Al Suwaidi, aimed at establishing solar, wind and hybrid energy projects with a combined capacity of 60 GW across Rajasthan's western districts. This partnership aligns with India's national goal of generating 500 GW of solar energy, for which Rajasthan is expected to contribute by installing 250 GW. Chief Minister Sharma emphasised that this initiative will significantly advance Rajasthan's role in renewable energy, marking a pivotal step toward sustainable energy transformation.

### **Jordan's King Abdullah II visits Saudi Arabia**

On 22 October 2024, King Abdullah II of Jordan along with Jordan's Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II visited Saudi Arabia and met with Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Both the leaders held discussions emphasising the strong bilateral relations between Jordan and Saudi Arabia and discussed regional issues, with a particular focus on addressing the crises in Gaza and Lebanon. They underscored the urgent need for a ceasefire in both regions and affirmed their steadfast support for the Palestinian and Lebanese people. Both leaders committed to increasing humanitarian aid to help alleviate the hardships faced by these communities, showcasing a unified stance

on supporting peace and stability efforts amid escalating regional tensions.

### **Saudi Crown Prince visits Egypt**

On 15 October 2024, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El Sisi held talks in Cairo, agreeing to boost trade and investment and calling for ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon. The leaders signed a mutual investment protection agreement and established a supreme coordination council to enhance collaboration. Amid rising regional tensions, they emphasised economic partnership in the energy, transport and tourism sectors. Saudi Arabia, moving towards investments over direct aid, has pledged US\$ 5 billion for Egyptian projects, targeting Red Sea and Sinai Peninsula developments. Egypt, facing economic challenges, also saw its sovereign bonds rally following the meeting, with significant gains in longer-term securities.

### **Parliamentary election takes place in Iraq's Kurdistan**

The initial results of the parliamentary elections held in Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on 20 October 2024 indicate the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) retained their primary positions in parliament. The elections, delayed for two years, saw a significant gain for the opposition New Generation Movement (NGM), which increased its seats from eight in the last election to 15. The KDP, while remaining the dominant party, saw a slight decrease, securing 39 seats compared to 45 in 2018. The PUK, based in Sulaymaniyah, maintained its position with a minor increase, gaining two more seats to hold a total of 23. This election also marked changes in the electoral system and seat allocations.