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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Prime Minister Modi visits Saudi Arabia

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a visit to Saudi Arabia on 22 April 2025, where he co-chaired the second India–Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council meeting with Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Both leaders welcomed the expansion of the Strategic Partnership Council with the establishment of two new ministerial committees on Defence Cooperation and Tourism and Culture Cooperation. They endorsed progress on Saudi Arabia's commitment to invest US\$ 100 billion in India, including agreements to collaborate on establishing two oil refineries. The leaders discussed enhancing cooperation on IMEC, payment gateway connectivity and local currency trade settlements. Four bilateral MoUs were signed in the fields of Space, Health, Sports (Anti-Doping), and Postal Cooperation. Prime Minister Modi also extended an invitation to the Crown Prince for the third meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council in India.

Crown Prince of Dubai visits India

During the visit of the Crown Prince of Dubai and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the UAE, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, to India from 8–9 April 2025, several key agreements and announcements were made to strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. These included establishing an Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad campus, the first overseas Indian Institute of Foreign Trade campus in Dubai, the commencement of Bharat Mart construction and the launch of its 3-D rendering. A plot of land was granted to set up the UAE-India Friendship Hospital in

Dubai. Cochin Shipyard Ltd and Drydocks World signed an MoU for developing ship repair clusters at Kochi and Vadinar. Progress on the Virtual Trade Corridor and the MAITRI interface was acknowledged, reinforcing trade ties under CEPA and IMEC frameworks. Additionally, an India Office of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce was announced to further boost investment and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Oman Facilitates US-Iran Nuclear Talks in Three-Round Diplomatic Push

Oman has hosted the third round of indirect nuclear talks between the US and Iran on 26 April in Muscat, following earlier rounds held on 12 April (Muscat) and 19 April (at the Omani embassy in Rome). Mediated by Oman, the talks aim to revive stalled diplomacy on Iran's nuclear programme. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy to Middle East Steve Witkoff led their delegations in all three rounds. While the first meeting was termed "positive and constructive," the second session in Rome helped clarify a framework for possible sanctions relief. The latest round focused on limiting uranium enrichment and easing economic restrictions, though gaps remain. Both sides have agreed to resume negotiations in early May in Europe.

Israel-Hamas war

Israel's military strikes and ground operations that resumed on 18 March 2025 continued in April. The war restarted due to deadlock over the ceasefire terms. Israel has opted for a military approach to rescue the remaining hostages. Reportedly, among 59 hostages, 36 are presumed to be dead. On 5 April, IDF announced its control over the

Morag corridor situated between Khan Yunis and Rafah in southern Gaza. The renewed military action and aid blockade have aggravated the humanitarian crisis. In Israel, protests have become more frequent, blaming the government for abandoning hostages and calling for an immediate end to the war. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz has stated that IDF will remain indefinitely in the security zones in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. Israel conducted a number of targeted killings of militants in Lebanon in April. Israel carried out airstrikes in Beirut's southern suburbs. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun condemned the latest strike, calling on France and the US to pressure Israel to halt its attacks, warning of rising regional instability.

Benjamin Netanyahu visits Hungary and the US

Hungary hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 3 April, defying the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant over alleged Gaza war crimes. Hungary withdrew from the ICC, calling it a "political forum" and arguing that the legal body has lost credibility. Israel welcomed Hungary's move, while the ICC and EU members criticised it. Hungary claims ICC laws were never enacted domestically. Despite criticism, the visit highlights Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's defiance and Netanyahu's effort to garner international support. After his trip to Hungary, Netanyahu visited the US and met with US President Donald Trump on 7 April 2025. Both leaders discussed the tariffs, the Iranian nuclear issue and the situation in Gaza. Trump reaffirmed efforts to free Hamas-held hostages, calling it a "long process."

Netanyahu said Israel was pursuing a new hostage deal while aiming to eliminate Hamas and give Gazans "freedom of choice."

Palestinian Authority Vice President appointed

On 26 April, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appointed Hussein Al Sheikh, a close aide, as Vice President of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), positioning him as a potential successor. His appointment, made during the 32nd Palestinian Central Council session, comes amid calls for PLO reform and plans for a larger Palestinian Authority (PA) role in post-war Gaza governance. Al Sheikh has held senior roles, including head of the General Authority of Civil Affairs and PLO Executive Committee's Secretary-General and head of the negotiations department. Al-Sheikh's appointment has been criticised by Hamas, which rejected imposed leadership and emphasised that only the Palestinian people can choose their representatives. Earlier on 23 April, Mahmoud Abbas asked the Hamas to release hostages, disarm and hand Gaza to the Palestinian Authority to end the war. Abbas argued that the hostages present an excuse for Israel to continue attacking Palestinians in Gaza.

Jordan bans Muslim Brotherhood

The Jordanian government banned the Muslim Brotherhood on 23 April, shortly after alleging the group's affiliates were plotting against the Kingdom. Interior Minister Mazin Al-Farrayeh announced that membership, activities, and promotion of the Brotherhood's ideas are now prohibited. The move follows recent arrests linked to a suspected sabotage plot,

including the manufacturing of drones and rockets. The announcement came as King Abdullah II met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah on the same day. King Abdullah highlighted the strong historical ties between the two nations and praised Saudi Arabia's support for Arab and Islamic causes. The leaders discussed regional issues, especially the Gaza and West Bank situation.

Qatar's Amir visits Russia

Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's official visit to Moscow on 17 April marked a significant boost to Qatar-Russia relations, with a focus on expanding cooperation in energy, trade, and diplomacy. During talks with President Vladimir Putin, Sheikh Tamim praised the growing investment ties, particularly in healthcare and pharmaceutical production. Both leaders welcomed the launch of a €2 billion joint investment platform and agreed to intensify collaboration in LNG infrastructure and high-tech sectors. Putin lauded Qatar's mediation role in Gaza and acknowledged its broader diplomatic efforts. The visit builds on the March 2025 Qatari-Russian Joint Committee meeting and signals Doha's pursuit of diversified international partnerships, positioning Qatar as both a major investor and regional mediator amid shifting global alignments.

UK amends Syria sanctions to support reconstruction and accountability

The UK government announced on 24 April 2025 amendments to its Syria sanctions regulations to help the Syrian people rebuild their country and economy following the fall of Assad. The changes lift sanctions on 12 entities, including the Syrian Ministries of Defence and Interior and several media companies, while

maintaining sanctions on former regime members and those linked to captagon trade. Restrictions on sectors such as financial services and energy production were eased to facilitate essential investment. The amendments also strengthen the UK's ability to hold Assad and his associates accountable for human rights violations and allow for future sanctions if necessary. This follows the March decision to lift asset freezes on 24 Syrian entities, including the Central Bank of Syria.

France, Egypt and Jordan trilateral held in Cairo

Leaders of France, Egypt and Jordan held a trilateral summit in Cairo on 7 April 2025 to address the escalating crisis in Gaza amidst renewed Israeli military strikes. Emmanuel Macron, Abdel Fattah El Sisi, and King Abdullah II called for an immediate return to the ceasefire, the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid, and the full implementation of the 19 January exchange deal to secure the release of all hostages and detainees. They condemned any displacement of Palestinians or annexation of Palestinian land and urged respect for international law and the historical status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites. Alarmed by the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, they urged a halt to unilateral actions undermining the two-State solution. The leaders endorsed the Gaza reconstruction plan adopted by the Arab League and the OIC in March, emphasising that governance and security must lie with an empowered Palestinian Authority. They also supported the upcoming Gaza reconstruction conference and coordinated efforts through the forthcoming June summit chaired by France and Saudi Arabia.