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WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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West Asian States' response to 'Operation Sindoor'

India launched 'Operation Sindoor' on 7 May in response to the terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam. The West Asian States condemned the attack and rejected all forms of terrorism. Expressing Israel's firm support for India, the Israeli Ambassador to India, Reuven Azar, stated that "Israel supports India's right to self-defence." Saudi Arabia and Iran offered mediation to ease tensions between the two. Saudi Arabia sent Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir to India and Pakistan on 8-9 May as part of the Kingdom's efforts to de-escalate tensions. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated that "Tehran stands ready to use its good offices in Islamabad and New Delhi to forge greater understanding at this difficult time." Most Arab countries condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack and welcomed the de-escalation between India and Pakistan. Türkiye, after condemning the 22 April terror attack, accused India of undertaking provocative steps targeting civilian and civilian infrastructure and suggested necessary mechanisms, including in counter-terrorism. Türkiye backed Pakistan's call for an investigation into the 22 April attack. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during a phone call with Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif on 7 May, expressed solidarity with Pakistan.

Donald Trump's visit to Gulf

US President Donald Trump visited Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar. Joined by prominent business executives, Trump signed investment agreements worth US\$ 2 trillion for defence, aviation and AI

projects. Saudi Arabia agreed to US\$ 600 billion in investments, including US\$ 142 billion in defence contracts and US\$ 80 billion in joint tech ventures involving Google, Oracle and others. Additional deals encompass infrastructure projects, AI chips from Nvidia, Starlink adoption and a US\$ 10 billion AMD initiative to develop AI data centres across both nations. Trump announced that he had signed over US\$ 200 billion in agreements with the UAE. Etihad Airways committed US\$ 14.5 billion to purchase 28 Boeing 787 and 777X aircraft with GE engines. Emirates Global Aluminium will invest US\$ 4 billion in a smelter project in Oklahoma. The UAE plans to build the world's largest AI data centre outside the US in Abu Dhabi, led by Emirati firm G42, covering 10 square miles with a 5-gigawatt capacity. Trump signed investment deals with Qatar worth US\$ 243.5 billion, with plans to expand to US\$ 1.2 trillion. Qatar pledged US\$ 10 billion for a US military facility and US\$ 42 billion in US weapons purchases. Qatar Airways will buy 210 Boeing jets valued at US\$ 96 billion. Al Rabban Capital committed US\$ 1 billion to quantum technology in the US, while defence deals included US\$ 3 billion for drones and counter-drone systems from Raytheon and General Atomics. During the visit, the US-GCC Summit was held in Riyadh, attended by President Donald Trump and the GCC rulers. The summit aimed to reinforce the strategic partnership between the GCC and the US to intensify joint action, activate the council's strategic alliance based on shared interests, and articulate current political and security challenges. The summit also emphasised the US's ongoing economic and security commitment to the Gulf region.

US and EU lift economic sanctions on Syria

The US State Department issued a waiver to the 2019 Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act to facilitate foreign firms to support Syria's recovery, including providing financial services and transactions involving petroleum products. US Secretary of State Mark Rubio stated that the waiver would "facilitate the provision of electricity, energy, water and sanitation and enable a more active humanitarian response across Syria". The EU Council announced the political decision to lift its economic sanctions on Syria, in line with its gradual and reversible approach to support Syria's transition and recovery. While general economic sanctions will be lifted, restrictive measures on arms and surveillance technology remain, and new targeted sanctions will be imposed on those violating human rights or destabilising Syria. The EU will engage the transitional government in safeguarding human rights and monitor ground developments, including accountability for recent violence, ahead of upcoming Foreign Affairs Council meetings.

Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs visits India

Amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Member of the Council of Ministers, and Climate Envoy Adel bin Ahmed Al Jubeir visited India and Pakistan on 8-9 May 2025. The unannounced visit was part of the Kingdom's efforts to de-escalate, end tension between India and Pakistan. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, after meeting with Al Jubeir,

stated, "A good meeting with Adel Al Jubeir, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, this morning. Shared India's perspective on firmly countering terrorism." Saudi Arabia condemned the 22 April terror attack in Pahalgam, and the political leadership convened frequent calls with the Indian leaders.

34th Arab League Summit takes place in Baghdad

The 34th Arab League Summit convened in Baghdad on 17 May 2025, with participation from all 22 member states and several regional and international organisations, mainly focusing on the ongoing crisis in Gaza. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a permanent and immediate Gaza ceasefire. Iraq's President Abdul Latif Rashid, assuming the bloc's rotating presidency from Bahrain, condemned Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories, labelling them as violations of human rights and international law. Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani proposed 18 initiatives to enhance Arab cooperation, including creating an Arab Fund for post-conflict reconstruction. He reaffirmed Iraq's support for Palestine, rejecting forced displacement and calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the West Bank. Iraq pledged US\$ 20 million each for Gaza's reconstruction and aid to Lebanon.

Israel launches Operation Gideon's Chariots

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF), following the security cabinet decision on 4 May, approved a plan to expand the military offensive and launched "Operation

Gideon's Chariots" on 16 May involving five divisions aimed at dismantling Hamas infrastructure and pressuring the group for a hostage deal. Hospitals in northern Gaza are reportedly out of service due to ongoing sieges. Amid the intensified fighting, reports from Gaza confirmed the death of Mohammad Sinwar, Hamas Gaza chief and brother of Yahya Sinwar, in an Israeli airstrike in Nuseirat. Earlier, Hamas released Edan Alexander, an Israeli-American hostage, as US political pressure mounts during Trump's visit to the Gulf States.

Meanwhile, tensions between Israel and the Houthis escalated dramatically. On 4 May, Houthis launched a ballistic missile that struck near Israel's Ben Gurion Airport, injuring eight people and causing a temporary suspension of flights. In retaliation, Israel conducted airstrikes on Houthi targets, including the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Isa. IDF attacked Sanaa International Airport on multiple occasions. In response to two projectiles towards Israel, the airport was attacked on 28 May, with Defence Minister Israel Katz claiming that the last remaining aircraft used by Houthis had been destroyed. The airport provides a vital link for more than 20 million Yemenis in Houthi-held areas, offering access to lifesaving medical treatment, medicine and aid.

King of Jordan visits US

Jordanian King Abdullah II met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington DC on 5 May to discuss their strategic partnership and ways to enhance cooperation in various sectors. Both leaders discussed the developments in

Palestine, Syria and the US role in promoting regional stability. King Abdullah II stressed the urgent need for a ceasefire in Gaza and the resumption of aid flow. He warned about the escalations in the West Bank, including unilateral measures against Palestinians and violations of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. He also emphasised the importance of creating a political horizon to achieve just and comprehensive peace based on the two-state solution.

PKK disbands and disarms in a peace move with Türkiye

On 12 May 2025, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) announced its dissolution and end to the armed struggle following its 12th Congress in northern Iraq, marking a significant change in its decades-long conflict with Türkiye. Declaring its "historical mission" accomplished, the PKK stated that its armed campaign had brought the Kurdish issue into the realm of democratic politics. The announcement, made through the Firat News Agency, followed a call by jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan earlier this year to disband. Türkiye's ruling AK Party hailed the move as a significant step toward achieving a "terror-free Türkiye," while President Erdoğan reaffirmed his government's commitment to ending terrorism. Although details of the peace initiative remain undisclosed, including disarmament mechanisms and the fighters' future, the development signals a potential turning point in the region. The PKK, designated a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, the US, and the EU, has waged an insurgency since 1984, resulting in over 40,000 deaths.