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मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

# WEST ASIA DIGEST

*Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia*

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## Saudi Crown Prince visits US

Saudi Arabia and the US signed agreements on investment, defence and technology during Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the US. Riyadh pledged to raise its US investments to nearly US\$1 trillion, directing funds toward high-tech industries and infrastructure that will support American jobs and supply chains. Washington approved the long-delayed sale of F-35 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia and formally designated the Kingdom a major non-NATO ally, easing future defence cooperation. The visit also secured Saudi access to advanced US AI chips and technologies, supporting its Vision 2030 diversification plans. Discussions on regional issues included the war in Sudan, where the US promised renewed diplomatic efforts, while Crown Prince maintained that any move toward the Abraham Accords required progress on a Palestinian two-state solution.

## Bahrain–UAE joint military exercise

Bahrain and the UAE held a joint military exercise "Rabdan Shuwaiman" in Manama on 22 November. It was attended by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE. The exercise brought together the Royal Guard of the Bahrain Defence Force and the Hamad bin Isa Airborne Brigade of the UAE Presidential Guard, with the objective of strengthening bilateral relations, advancing the strategic partnership and enhancing military cooperation. The exercise featured field drills, joint planning, coordinated operations, air support, and airborne landing procedures, reflecting strong professionalism and operational cohesion.

## Parliamentary elections held in Iraq

Iraq's parliamentary elections were held on 11 November 2025, with special voting on 9 November, and the final results were announced on 17 November. The Reconstruction and Development Coalition led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani won the highest number of seats, securing 46, while no single bloc achieved a majority in the 329-member Council of Representatives. The Progress Party claimed 27 seats, the State of Law Coalition secured 29, the Kurdistan Democratic Party won 26 and the Al Sadiqoun Bloc also obtained 27 seats. Voter turnout exceeded 56 per cent, marking a significant rise from the 41 per cent recorded in 2021. Following the vote, Iraq has entered a prolonged coalition-building phase, with the Coordination Framework signaling its intent to form the largest bloc.

## DP World begins operations at Syria's Tartus port

The UAE-based logistics giant DP World began its operations at Syria's Tartus port in November 2025 after finalising a 30-year, US\$800 million Build-Operate-Transfer concession agreement in July 2025. The agreement granted the company full operational control to modernise and expand the multipurpose terminal, with investments directed toward dredging access channels, upgrading berths, and replacing outdated handling equipment. The project aims to increase storage and handling capacity and develop bulk handling systems in the medium term, positioning Tartus as a key Eastern Mediterranean trade hub. The deal followed the annulment of a previous 49-year contract with Russia's Stroytransgaz over breaches of obligations. The launch of operations is being viewed as a significant step in Syria's post-war reconstruction and

its gradual reintegration into regional economic networks.

### **US to designate certain Muslim Brotherhood chapters as FTOs**

US President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order on 24 November 2025, to assess whether specific chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood – such as those in Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan – should be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organisations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists. The move is aimed to restrict the groups' capabilities, cut off resources, and counter threats to US national security. The decision followed allegations that Brotherhood-linked elements supported militant activity after the 7 October 2023 attacks, including rocket fire from Lebanon, incitement by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's leadership, and material backing from Jordanian affiliates.

### **Lebanon and Cyprus finalise maritime border deal**

Lebanon and Cyprus signed a long-delayed maritime border agreement on 26 November 2025, ending nearly two decades of deadlock that had hindered oil and gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides formalised the accord, completing a process that began with an initial deal in 2007 but stalled due to Lebanon's dispute with Israel and internal political turmoil. The agreement followed progress made after the 2022 US-mediated Lebanon-Israel maritime settlement. Cyprus gained new opportunities to expand its hydrocarbon exploration as Europe sought alternatives to Russian gas, while Lebanon viewed offshore resources as vital for its recovery from a severe economic crisis.

### **US approves sale of advanced AI chips to UAE and Saudi Arabia**

The US Commerce Department approved the sale of up to 70,000 advanced AI chips to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, marking a major shift in Washington's technology-export policy. The decision authorised each country's state-backed entities – G42 in Abu Dhabi and Humain in Saudi Arabia – to purchase up to 35,000 Nvidia GB300 servers built on the Blackwell B300 processor, one of the most powerful AI chips available. The approval reversed earlier export restrictions and followed major investment pledges by both nations, along with commitments to prevent any diversion of the technology to China. The move aligned with the Trump administration's strategy of using AI hardware exports to bolster diplomatic ties and reinforce US leadership in the sector. The authorisation coincided with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Washington, while both G42 and Humain were expanding large-scale data center projects, including G42's "Stargate UAE" initiative with partners such as OpenAI and Nvidia.

### **Piyush Goyal visits Israel**

India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal visited Israel reinforcing the growing strategic and economic partnership between both states. During the visit, he held key meetings with top Israeli leadership, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, Minister of Economy and Industry Nir Barkat, Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich and Minister of Agriculture Avi Dichter. A major highlight of the trip was the signing of the Terms of Reference to begin negotiations on the India–Israel Free Trade Agreement, aimed at boosting trade, investment and technology collaboration. Discussions also focused on expanding

cooperation in emerging areas such as agriculture, water technology, defence, cybersecurity, AI, quantum computing and innovation. Goyal participated in the India–Israel Business and CEOs Forum, which saw over 250 B2B interactions.

### **Israel approves plan to settle India's Bnei Menashe community**

Israel has approved a plan to bring the remaining members of India's Bnei Menashe community to the country by 2030. Under a cabinet decision led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Immigration Minister Ofir Sofer, 1,200 people will arrive by 2026, followed by about 5,800 overall, completing the community's relocation. The new immigrants will be settled mainly in Nof HaGalil and other northern towns, with government assistance for housing, employment, Hebrew learning and integration. Netanyahu called the decision an important Zionist step that strengthens Israel's north. Around 4,000 Bnei Menashe have already immigrated over the past two decades. The Bnei Menashe are an ethnic community from Mizoram and Manipur who identify as descendants of the biblical Tribe of Manasseh and were officially recognised by Israel in 2005.

### **Developments in Gaza**

The 20-point Gaza Peace Plan, unveiled on 29 September 2025, remains stalled as key first-phase requirements – full aid access and the return of all deceased hostages – are incomplete. Hamas freed 20 living hostages on 13 October but has recovered only 26 of 28 bodies. Ceasefire implementation has been severely strained: between 10 October and 22 November, Gaza authorities reported 497 Israeli violations, including raids beyond the Yellow Line, heavy bombardments, and tightened aid restrictions, with only 5,458 trucks entering

by 25 November. Clashes continued, killing more than 350 Palestinians and three IDF soldiers. Israel's security concerns post-ceasefire has persisted due to Hamas' refusal to disarm and relinquish political control. In Israel, thousands rallied at Tel Aviv's Habima Square demanding a state-led inquiry into the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack, rejecting Netanyahu's government probe as a "whitewash." On 23 November, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir dismissed or censured senior officers for failures on 7 October 2023.

### **Ahmed Al Sharaa visits US**

In a visit to the White House on 10 November 2025, Syrian President Ahmed Al Sharaa met President Trump, marking the first-ever visit by a Syrian leader. Syria announced it would join the US-led coalition against the Islamic State, becoming its 90<sup>th</sup> member. The meeting also paved the way for major policy shifts, including the US decision to suspend the Caesar Act for 180 days and begin easing decades-old sanctions to encourage investment and Syria's reconstruction. Discussions also covered Syria's possible future participation in the Abraham Accords and expanding US–Syria cooperation on security, counterterrorism, and regional diplomacy.

On 19 November, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited forward Israeli military positions in southern Syria, wearing body armour and meeting troops stationed east of the UN-patrolled buffer zone near the Golan Heights. The visit signals Israel's intent to maintain control of new outposts established after Bashar Al Assad's ouster. Netanyahu stressed protecting Israel's northern border and its Druze allies. Damascus sharply condemned the tour as a blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty and an attempt to entrench a new territorial reality while US-brokered security talks remain stalled.