ABOUT US

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DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

DPG West Asia Review contains major developments in West Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open source media. To subscribe please click here.

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the employment scenario in West Asia. In a latest survey of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, close to 59 per cent businesses face closure in next 6 months and economic recovery could take at least a year. In other major economic news from the region, Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) has invested Rs. 11,367 Crore in Reliance Jio; while, Abu Dhabi’s Mubadala is likely to invest $1.2 billion in the same.

Iranian economy is reeling from the unprecedented economic sanctions imposed by the United States. On June 20, 2020, Iran’s currency fell to a record low of 190,000 Rial against the US Dollar. However, the United States has given some respite to Iran by sparing strategically crucial “Chabahar port” from sanctions as it is key to stabilise Afghanistan.

Iran’s nuclear program is once again in the news with IAEA Chief Rafael Grossi demanding “prompt access” to two sites where Iran is thought to have stored/used undeclared nuclear material. In other major update, former US National Security Advisor John Bolton has claimed that President Trump was willing to support Israeli strike on Iran in 2017.

On June 17, 2020, the United States imposed economic sanctions on Syria through the Caesar Act to deter foreign business activity with President Assad. Meanwhile in Yemen, separatists from the Southern Transitional Council have seized island of Socotra from the Saudi backed Yemeni government.

Thousands of Indians stranded abroad have already returned home as part of the “Vande Bharat Mission”. It is likely that by June end about 90,000 more Indians will return from the United Arab Emirates. More than 450,000 Indians have registered with the Indian authorities in the UAE for repatriation amid COVID-19.

Links to major developments in West Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open source media, can be found below.
Bahrain

Economic Recovery to Take a Year: 59% See Closure Risk: Bahrain Survey

June 18, 2020, Trade Arabia

A recent survey by Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) says that around 59 per cent of businesses are facing the risk of shutting down in the next 6 months amid fears of significant layoffs if the pandemic continues.

Bahrain Becomes 1st Country in MENA to Ratify Key UN Treaty

June 16, 2020, Arab News

Bahrain has become the first country in MENA to ratify a key UN convention on electronic communications, helping to enable a new wave of digital business across the region and enhance investor protections.
Egypt

Egypt Threatens Military Action in Libya if Turkish-backed Forces Seize Sirte

June 21, 2020, Financial Times

Egypt’s leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has threatened to intervene militarily in neighbouring Libya if Turkish-backed forces capture Sirte, a strategic port and gateway to important oil terminals.
Iraq

**Fifth Rocket Attack Hits Baghdad’s Green Zone**

June 19, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Rockets have landed inside the heavily fortified Green Zone in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on Thursday (June 18), for the fifth time in ten days, according to a security source within the Green Zone.

**OPEC+ Panel Receives Plans for Extra Oil Cuts from Quota Busters Iraq, Kazakhstan**

June 18, 2020, S&P Global

Iraq and Kazakhstan have submitted their plans to the OPEC+ alliance on how they will implement deeper oil production cuts in the coming months, following through on pledges to make good on violating their quotas in May.

**Turkey Says It Hit More than 500 PKK Targets in Northern Iraq**

June 18, 2020, Al Jazeera

Turkish forces have hit more than 500 targets in northern Iraq as part of an operation in the region against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkey’s Defence Ministry said.
Iran

Iran's Currency Hits Record Low amid Sanctions, Coronavirus and International Pressure
June 20, 2020, Times of Israel
Iran's currency has dropped to its lowest value ever at 190,000 Rial for each dollar amid severe US sanctions against the country, new international pressure over its nuclear and weapons programs and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Russia Opposed to Attempts to Manipulate UNSC on Iran Nuclear Deal
June 16, 2020, TASS News Agency
Russia will strongly oppose attempts to manipulate the UN Security Council on the back of events involving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Tuesday (June 16) before starting negotiations with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Iran's Zarif Sees Trump Favourite to Win U.S. Presidential Election
June 14, 2020, Reuters
Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Saturday (June 21) that U.S. President Donald Trump still has a good chance of being re-elected thanks to his strong support base, despite his declining support in recent months.

President Trump was Prepared to back Israeli Strike on Iran: John Bolton
June 21, 2020, The Jerusalem Post
US President Donald Trump expressed willingness to support Israeli strikes on Iran, according to his former national security advisor John Bolton. In Bolton's book 'The Room Where it Happened', he describes a 2017 meeting in which Trump made the comments.

Iran's Chabahar Port Spared from US Sanctions in Rare Cooperation
June 20, 2020, Al Jazeera
Despite escalating tensions between the United States and Iran, both countries see Iran's Chabahar port as key to stabilising neighbouring Afghanistan.
Iran Nuclear Row Escalates as China Warns of Dire Consequences
June 19, 2020, The National
China on Thursday (June 18) warned that even a toned-down rebuke of Tehran over its lack of cooperation with nuclear inspectors could unravel global efforts to contain the spread of atomic weapons.

U.S. Wants face-to-face Meeting with Iran on Prisoners
June 17, 2020, Reuters
The United States would like a face-to-face meeting with Iran to discuss prisoner releases and it wants the U.N. Security Council to impose an indefinite arms embargo on the Islamic Republic, a senior U.S. diplomat said on Tuesday (June 16).

IAEA Chief Asks Iran For ‘Prompt Access’ to Blocked Nuclear Sites
June 15, 2020, Al Jazeera
The head of the United Nations's atomic watchdog agency has said Iran must provide inspectors "prompt access" to two sites where the country is thought to have stored or used undeclared nuclear material.

Iran Tests Cruise Missile, Claims It Can Destroy Targets 280 Kilometers Away
June 18, 2020, Iran Press
The Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has successfully fired short and long-range homegrown cruise missiles produced by the Ministry of Defense in the northern Indian Ocean and the Oman Sea on Thursday (June 18).
Israel

John Bolton Reveals Type of Nuke Material Israel's Mossad Found in Iran
June 21, 2020, The Jerusalem Post
The nuclear material which Iran was trying to conceal, but the Mossad discovered during its 2018 operation seizing Tehran’s nuclear secrets, was probably “yellowcake,” former US National Security Adviser reveals in his new book.

JINSA Warns US Weapons Stockpile in Israel ‘Falling Dangerously Short’
June 18, 2020, The Jerusalem Post
A new paper released by the Jewish Institute for the National Security of America (JINSA) has called on the United States to replenish its weapons stockpile in Israel as the threats posed by Iran and Hezbollah continue to grow on the country’s northern borders.

US Democrats Circulate Israel Letter Expressing ‘concern’ over West Bank Annexation
June 18, 2020, Middle East Eye
Democrats in the US House of Representatives are circulating a letter cautioning Israel against annexing parts of the Palestinian West Bank, with a statement that expresses “deep concern” but fails to mention any potential consequences from Washington.

In address to American Jews, Pompeo urges Israel to stand with US against China
June 15, 2020, Times of Israel
US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, speaking to the American Jewish Committee, urged Israel to stand with the United States against China. “Standing up to the Chinese Communist Party is a growing challenge to the United States, to Israel, indeed to all free people,” he said in an address to the AJC’s annual Global Forum.
Jordan

Jordanian FM Warns of ‘Long and Violent’ Conflict If Israel Pursues West Bank Annexation

June 18, 2020, Times of Israel

Israeli annexation plans in the West Bank pose an “unprecedented danger” and could spark a “long and violent” conflict, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warned Thursday (June 18) during a rare visit to Ramallah.
Kuwait

Kuwait Mulls Increasing Expat Fees by 150%

June 16, 2020, Gulf News

The Kuwaiti Ministry of Economic Affairs has proposed 150 per cent increase in expatriate service fees. The ministry’s proposal aimed at addressing the demographic imbalance in Kuwait where expats constitute nearly 70 per cent of the population.
Lebanon

Caesar Act: Fresh Sanctions on Syria Could Worsen Lebanon’s Economy

June 18, 2020, Al Jazeera

The US has introduced more sanctions against Syria's government and its backers, warning it will not stop until President Bashar al-Assad ends the war against his own people. Some of those targeted are in neighbouring Lebanon.
Oman

**Oman's Plans for a Mega Oil Storage Facility is Finally Making Progress**

June 18, 2020, Gulf News

Oman's goal of building the biggest oil-storage facility in the Middle East is finally progressing, more than seven years after the sultanate announced the plan.

**3,000 Indians Flown Home on 15 Chartered Flights from Oman**

June 15, 2020, Times of Oman

3,000 Indian expats in Oman have been flown home on 15 chartered flights organised by companies and social organisations in the country to repatriate people during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, officials from the Embassy of India in Muscat have said.
Qatar

Over 10,000 Indians Repatriated from Qatar

June 15, 2020, Gulf Times

The Indian embassy on Monday said it has so far managed to facilitate a total of 61 flights from Qatar to India, repatriating 10,645 passengers.
Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia Lifts Coronavirus Curfew
June 21, 2020, BBC News

Saudi Arabia has lifted its nationwide curfew, but says other restrictions will remain. Authorities say all economic and commercial activities will resume, but bans on international travel and religious pilgrimages will not change.

UK Accused of Selling Arms to Saudi Arabia a Year after Court Ban
June 21, 2020, The Guardian

The British government stands accused of ignoring a landmark court ruling restricting UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia’s PIF Invests Rs 11,367 Crore in Jio Platforms
June 19, 2020, Indian Express

Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia has invested Rs 11,367 crore in Jio Platforms Ltd, the digital arm of Reliance Industries (RIL). This investment values Jio Platforms at an equity value of Rs 4.91 lakh crore and an enterprise value of Rs 5.16 lakh crore.

Amazon Launches Saudi Arabia Shopping Site
June 18, 2020, Reuters

Amazon.com Inc on Wednesday launched a website for shoppers in Saudi Arabia, showing its continued business interests there despite a public dispute between Riyadh and the company’s chief executive, Jeff Bezos.

Saudi Aramco Cuts Hundreds of Jobs amid Oil Price Collapse
June 18, 2020, Oilprice.com

The world’s biggest oil-producing company, Saudi oil giant Aramco, has started laying off hundreds of employees—mostly foreign staff—across several divisions in response to the oil price crash.
Syria

Syria War: New US Sanctions Target Assad Government's Foreign Backers

June 17, 2020, BBC News

The US has imposed tough new economic sanctions (Caesar Act) aimed at deterring foreign business activity with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government.
Turkey

Turkey Favours Dialogue with Greece on East Med, Greek Deputy Minister Says
June 21, 2020, Daily Sabah

Turkey wants to establish a dialogue with Athens on the Eastern Mediterranean, but it also needs to protect its own interests, the Greek alternate minister for migration and asylum policy said Saturday (June 20).

Turkey, India Trade Grows Steadily
June 16, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Trade volume between Turkey and India has posted a steady growth for the last two years, a business council head has said.
UAE

US Threatens UAE with Sanctions over Plans to Normalize Ties with Syria

June 20, 2020, Tasnim News Agency

The US has threatened the United Arab Emirates with sanctions imposed under the Caesar Act as the Persian Gulf state continues to normalize ties with Syria under Bashar al-Assad.

90,000 Indians to be Repatriated from UAE with Dozens More Chartered And Government Flights Cleared

June 18, 2020, The National

About 90,000 Indians will be home by the month-end as dozens more chartered and government repatriation flights from the UAE have been approved. More than 450,000 Indians have registered with the consulate in Dubai and embassy in Abu Dhabi to return to their families amid the coronavirus pandemic.
Yemen

**Yemen Crisis: Separatists Take Over ‘Galapagos of Indian Ocean’**

June 21, 2020, BBC News

Separatists are consolidating control after taking over an island known as the “Galapagos” of the Indian Ocean, at the same time further complicating the long-running conflict in Yemen. Socotra, the main island in an archipelago at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden, is famed for its flora and fauna.

**Saudi Arabia Seeks to end Standoff in South Yemen amid Coronavirus Fears**

June 18, 2020, Saudi Gazette

In an effort to unite forces against Iran-backed Houthi militia, Saudi Arabia is making overtures to the Southern Transitional Council to join the government led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.