



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



Volume III, Issue 18 | May 3, 2021

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



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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

To supplement the national effort in fighting the surging second COVID-19 wave, Indian Navy has launched operation 'Samudra Setu-II' to bring oxygen-filled cryogenic containers to India from abroad. INS Talwar picked up 40 MT Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) from Manama (Bahrain) on April 30. While, INS Kolkata proceeded to Doha (Qatar), for embarking medical supplies and will thereafter head to Kuwait for embarking liquid oxygen tanks. Further, the Qatar Airways has promised to airlift 300 tonnes of medical items to India from various global suppliers free of charge. India's strategic partner UAE has sent special cargo with medical aid including 157 ventilators, 480 Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure (BiPAPs) and other medical supplies. India will also get a shipment of 450,000 vials of 'remdesivir' from US-based innovator of the drug, Gilead Sciences Inc, and its Egypt-based voluntary licensee Eva Pharma in various tranches till July.

On the regional security front, Iranian negotiator participating in Vienna Talks on resuming the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) mentioned that, "Tehran expects US sanctions on oil, banks and other sectors and on most individuals and institutions to be lifted based on agreements reached so far at talks in Vienna". Iran's state media also reported that, "Washington and Tehran have agreed to a prisoner swap agreement in exchange for the release of USD7 billion frozen Iranian oil funds under U.S. sanctions in other countries". The US and UK however have denied these reports. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stated that, "there is still a fair distance to travel to close the remaining gaps over what sanctions the US and other countries will roll back. They are over what nuclear restrictions Iran will accept on its programme to ensure that they can never get a nuclear weapon".

Meanwhile commenting on the Vienna talks, Russian Ambassador said, "revived nuclear deal with Iran could be signed in three weeks...it's too early to be excited, but we have reasons for cautious and growing optimism". However, it appears that the Iranian Presidential election scheduled to be held next month and a leaked audio tape of Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will complicate nuclear talks. In this tape, Mr. Zarif said, "Gen. Soleimani undermined me in many steps, working with Russia to sabotage the nuclear deal while adopting policies toward Syria's long war that damaged Iran's interests". "In Iran, the military field rules...I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the military servicing diplomacy", Zarif added.

Considering Israel's growing unease over the JCPOA, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Director of the Mossad Yossi Cohen in Washington, while Israeli NSA met his US counterpart. The Israeli delegation stressed on their "freedom to operate" against Iran as they see fit, while expressing deep concerns about Tehran's nuclear activities. On its part, the US State Department stressed on, "the Biden administration's commitment toward coordination and transparency with Israel in its nuclear diplomacy with Iran". Meanwhile Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen warned that, "a bad deal (with Iran) will send the region spiralling into war". "Israel will not allow Iran to develop nuclear arms. Iran has no immunity anywhere. Our planes (fighter aircrafts) can reach everywhere in the Middle East - and certainly Iran", Cohen added. It must be noted that, Israeli Air-Force has received a new intelligence aircraft "Oron" in early April that will provide the military with "unprecedented" reconnaissance capabilities.

On the energy front, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that, "Riyadh was in discussions to sell one percent of Aramco to a leading global energy company". As a result of this, Saudi Arabia reportedly is in talks with sovereign wealth fund 'China Investment Corporation' (CIC) as well as other Chinese national oil companies. This comes amid a series of agreements China has secured in the Middle East for long-term oil and gas supply as noted in the earlier issues of DPG West Asia Review. In another development, Saudi Crown Prince stressed that, "Riyadh and Washington were 90 percent in agreement over the interests of the two countries...disagreements represent less than 10 percent and we are working to find solutions...there is no doubt that the US is a strategic partner". In a related development, the Biden administration is likely to send a delegation to Saudi Arabia and the UAE to discuss concerns about Vienna talks, and UAE's purchase of the F-35 aircraft.

Following US recognition of the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide, Turkey's 'Incirlik Air Base' is at the center of Ankara-Washington relations. This base has been used by the US for operations against the Daesh (ISIS). "The US reportedly stores dozens of B61 nuclear weapons at this base for delivery by American aircrafts". If Turkey were to close this base, it would severely impact bilateral strategic relations, and could even end Turkey-US alliance.

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

Bahrain

[Indian Navy Launches Operation Samudra Setu-II to Bring Medical Oxygen from Abroad](#)

May 02, 2021, India Today

The Indian Navy launched operation 'Samudra Setu-II' to bring oxygen-filled cryogenic containers to India from abroad including Bahrain as the country faces a severe shortage of medical oxygen in the wake of a massive spike in new Covid-19 cases.

Egypt

[India to Get 4,50,000 Vials of Remdesivir](#)

April 30, 2021, Mint

India will get a shipment of 450,000 vials of remdesivir from US-based innovator of the drug, Gilead Sciences Inc, and its Egypt-based voluntary licensee Eva Pharma in various tranches till July.

[Egypt's President Extends Condolences to India Over Coronavirus Deaths](#)

April 30, 2021, Ahram Online

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi offered his condolences to India over its coronavirus deaths, amid a grim surge in the Asian country's daily infections and fatalities.

Iraq

[Iraqi Health officials Warn of Double-mutant Coronavirus Variant Identified in India](#)

May 01, 2021, CGTN

"The strain of the coronavirus (identified) in India has higher transmissibility and its danger is greater than the strain in Britain, and it affects young people and children," Ruba Falah, head of the ministry's media office said.

[CENTCOM Commander: US Forces Present in Iraq at Government's Request](#)

May 1, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

Commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) Kenneth McKenzie said US forces are still present in Iraq at the request of the government. "We've been invited to be there. That's why we're there. And we're there to continue the fight against ISIS, along with many coalition partners who are there with us".

[China Snubs U.S. With Huge Iraqi Gas Deal](#)

April 29, 2021, Oilprice.com

The China Petroleum & Chemical Corp. (Sinopec) last week signed a 25-year deal with Iraq's Ministry of Oil that gives it a 49 per cent stake in the Mansuriya natural gas site. The contract follows Sinopec's signing of a long-term purchase and sales agreement with Qatar Petroleum for 2 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) for a term of 10 years.

Iran

[US Sanctions on Oil, Banks Expected to be Lifted: Iran Negotiator](#)

May 01, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator said Tehran expects US sanctions on oil, banks and other sectors and on most individuals and institutions to be lifted based on agreements reached so far at talks in Vienna.

[Washington Denies Iran State Media Report Saying Prisoner Swap Agreed](#)

May 02, 2021, Reuters

The United States on Sunday (May 02) denied a report by Iran's state television that the arch-foes had reached a prisoner swap deal in exchange for the release of \$7 billion frozen Iranian oil funds under U.S. sanctions in other countries.

['Three-week Target' for New Iran Nuclear Deal](#)

May 01, 2021, Arab News

Diplomats are aiming for a revived nuclear deal with Iran to be signed in three weeks, after new talks on Saturday (May 01) in Vienna. "It's too early to be excited, but we have reasons for cautious and growing optimism," Russian Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov said.

[A Bombshell Recording in Iran Threatens to Complicate Nuclear Negotiations in Vienna](#)

April 30, 2021, NBC News

The bombshell leak of an audio recording with Iran's foreign minister has exposed bitter internal divisions in Iran, threatening to complicate delicate negotiations between Tehran and the United States to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement.

[Iran's Foreign Minister, in Leaked Tape, Says Revolutionary Guards \(IRGC\) Set Policies](#)

April 25, 2021, The New York Times

In a leaked audiotape that offers a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes power struggles of Iranian leaders, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the Revolutionary Guards Corps call the shots, overruling many government decisions and ignoring advice.

[Iran Nuclear Talks Resume in Vienna, but Does Russia Want a Deal?](#)

April 27, 2021, RFI

World powers were set to resume high level talks in Vienna focused on bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, in their first session since comments surfaced from the Iranian foreign minister alleging that Russia once tried to undermine the pact.

[Iran Welcomes Saudi Arabia's 'Change of Tone': Iranian MFA](#)

April 30, 2021, Reuters

Iran welcomed what it called a change of tone from Saudi Arabia and said it hoped they could work together to secure peace, amid moves to ease tensions between the regional rivals.

Israel

[Israel Bans Travel to India, Six Other Countries with High Covid-19 Infections](#)

May 02, 2021, Mint

Israel barred its citizens from travelling to India and six other countries, citing high Covid infection rates there.

[Israeli Air Force Debuts New Spy Aircraft](#)

April 05, 2021, The Economic Times

The Israeli Defence Ministry said the country's Air Force has received a new intelligence aircraft "Oron" that will provide the military with "unprecedented" reconnaissance capabilities.

[Israel is Enhancing Its Air Force's Capability of Striking Iran](#)

May 02, 2021, Forbes

Israel is once again warning that it may have no choice but to pre-emptively attack Iran's nuclear facilities to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons. IAF is becoming more capable of executing such a challenging mission than ever before.

[Our Warplanes Can Reach Iran, Israeli Minister Warns amid Nuclear Talks](#)

April 29, 2021, Reuters

Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen sharpened his country's warnings against what it would deem a bad new nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, saying war with Tehran would be sure to follow.

[Secretary Blinken Meets Director of the Mossad amid Israeli 'Unease' over Iran Talks](#)

April 30, 2021, The Arab Weekly

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other top Biden administration national security aides met with the Director of Mossad, Yossi Cohen, for talks that focused primarily on Iran, according to officials familiar with the meeting who said Israeli officials expressed "deep concern" about Tehran's nuclear activities.

[Israel's Ambassador to the US: We Won't be Bound by Iran Deal](#)

April 29, 2021, The Times of Israel

After US President Joe Biden made only brief mention of Iran's nuclear program during his first speech to Congress, Israel's Ambassador to the US Gilad Erdan said

that Jerusalem will not allow its security to be dependent on or bound by an international agreement that it is not a party to.

[Condolences Pour in as Israel Buries Dead after Jewish Festival Stampede Kills 45](#)

April 30, 2021, Arab News

Israel buried victims of a stampede at a Jewish pilgrimage site that killed at least 45 people, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised an investigation into one of the nation's "worst disasters."

Jordan

[Jordan Detects Three Cases of Indian COVID-19 Variant, Reports Minister](#)

May 02, 2021, The Economic Times

Jordan detected three cases of the Indian COVID-19 variant in people who had not travelled, the health minister said.

Kuwait

[8 Judges on Trial for Money Laundering in Kuwait](#)

May 1, 2021, Middle East Monitor

For the first time in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti Public Prosecution has referred eight judges to trial accused of money laundering in the Bnaider Network cases.

Lebanon

[Lebanon Resumes Maritime Border Talks with Israel in a Weak Position](#)

May 02, 2021, Arab News

Lebanon and Israel will resume technical negotiations on demarcating their maritime border, under US auspices, at the UN headquarters in Ras Al-Naqoura in southern Lebanon over the weekend.

Oman

[Civil Aviation Authority Issues Clarification on Flights Between Oman and India](#)

May 01, 2021, Gulf News

Oman's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA Oman) issued a clarification recently saying that very limited flights between the Sultanate and India are operating to facilitate the return of Omani citizens in addition to shipping the necessary supplies to the Sultanate.

Qatar

[Qatar Airways to Airlift 300 Tonnes of Medical Supplies to India Free of Charge](#)

April 29, 2021, The Economic Times

Qatar Airways said it will airlift 300 tonnes of medical items to India from various global suppliers free of charge. India is struggling with the second wave of coronavirus infection as hospitals in several states are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds.

[Ex-Qatar PM Warns of Impact of US, China Competition on Gulf Region](#)

April 29, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Qatar's former Prime Minister, Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani, warned of the repercussions of the intense competition between the United States and China on the Gulf region and called on the Arab Gulf states to ensure their interests are protected.

Saudi Arabia

[Chinese Investors in Talks to Take Aramco Stake, Say Sources](#)

April 29, 2021, Reuters

Sovereign wealth fund China Investment Corporation (CIC) could buy a stake of one percent (around \$19 billion) in Saudi Aramco. Aramco was talking to CIC, as well as Chinese national oil companies, said one of the sources close to CIC.

[Saudi Arabia Includes Hindu Epics in New School Curriculum](#)

April 28, 2021, Middle East Monitor

In line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the kingdom has introduced the ancient Indian epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata into the school curriculum. A tweet which has gone viral by Nouf Al-Marwaai, the first Saudi yoga instructor and founder of the Arab Yoga Foundation, included a screenshot of her son's social studies exam with questions on Hinduism and Buddhism.

[Saudi Arabia Still Has Some issues with Biden Administration, Will Resolve: Crown Prince](#)

April 28, 2021, Republic World

Saudi Arabia still has some issues with the United States President Joe Biden administration and was working to resolve them, said the kingdom's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in remarks that were aired on April 27. Saudi's de facto ruler also said that the nation would not pay heed to any pressure tactics or interference in its internal affairs.

Syria

[US Lauds OPCW Vote Suspending Syria's Voting Rights](#)

April 21, 2021, Anadolu Agency

The US lauded a vote among member states at the global chemical weapons watchdog that removed Syria's voting rights in response to the regime's repeated use of banned weapons.

[U.S., European Countries Reject Syrian Presidential Election Results in Advance](#)

April 30, 2021, The Hindu

Western members of the UN Security Council, led by the United States, France and Britain rejected the outcome of Syria's May 26 presidential election in advance, a position denounced by Russia as "unacceptable."

Turkey

[Incirlik Air Base Becomes Focus of US-Turkey Relations Again](#)

April 29, 2021, Arab News

Turkey's Incirlik Air Base is once again at the center of debates over Ankara-Washington relations, following US President Joe Biden's recognition of the Ottoman era Armenian genocide. Incirlik Air Base — commonly used by the US for operations in the Middle East, particularly attacks on Daesh — has always been a bargaining chip for Turkey against America.

[Azerbaijan Ready to Host Trilateral Summit with Turkey, Israel](#)

April 26, 2021, Daily Sabah

Baku is ready to host a trilateral summit with Ankara and Tel Aviv, Azerbaijani presidential aide Hikmet Hajiyev said. "Turkey is a sister country of Azerbaijan and Israel is our strategic partner. We want our friends to be friends with each other. If the sides agree to such an initiative, then Azerbaijan will always welcome them".

UAE

[UAE Supports India Amid Surging COVID-19 Cases, Special Cargo with Medical Aid Arrives](#)

April 29, 2021, Republic World

As solidarity is pouring in from all around the globe, UAE lent their support to India's ongoing tussle with COVID-19 record-breaking figures nationwide. A special cargo with medical aid including 157 ventilators, 480 Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure (BiPAPs) and other medical supplies arrived from UAE to India on April 29.

[Biden to Send US Delegation to Saudi Arabia, UAE to Discuss Regional Issues: Sources](#)

April 29, 2021, Arab News

Discussions are expected to include developments on talks with Iran on the nuclear deal taking place in Vienna, the UAE's purchase of the next generation of F-35 aircraft, as well as the ongoing efforts to calm tensions in the Middle East.

Yemen

[Saudi-led Coalition Intercepts Rebel Drone from Yemen](#)

May 02, 2021, Anadolu Agency

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said it had intercepted and destroyed an explosive-laden drone fired by Houthi rebels towards Saudi Arabia. A coalition statement cited by the official Saudi news agency SPA said the drone was fired towards the southwestern city of Khamis Mushait.

[UN Urges all Parties to 'Seize Opportunity' for Peace in Yemen](#)

April 13, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The United Nations called on all parties involved in the conflict in Yemen to "seize the opportunity" for a diplomatic solution as world powers held virtual talks. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths told reporters in Berlin ahead of the negotiations that peace efforts had reached a "critical moment" after six years of fighting.



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