



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



Volume III, Issue 24 | June 14, 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

Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Kuwait on June 10 and launched celebration of the 60th anniversary of India-Kuwait relations in company of his counterpart. Importantly, the two sides signed a MoU that will streamline the recruitment of Indian workers that will give them greater protection, and also discussed ways to boost cooperation in food, cyber, and energy security sectors. Further, Dr. Jaishankar held a meeting with Indian Ambassadors to the Gulf countries with the focus on; welfare of Indian community in the region, facilitating reunion of families separated by Covid disruption, interceding for early return of Indians who left the gulf during the pandemic, encouraging speedy resumption of flights, and pushing for trade interests that would contribute to economic recovery in India.

In an important development, leader of Yamina party 'Naftali Bennett' has been sworn in as Israel's new Prime Minister ousting Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud Party) from power after 12 years. 'Yair Lapid' will be Israel's next Foreign Minister replacing 'Gabi Ashkenazi'. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Naftali Bennett and stressed on further "strengthening strategic partnership between the two countries, as New Delhi and Tel Aviv celebrate 30 years of the up-gradation of diplomatic relations next year". Meanwhile US President Biden also congratulated the new Israeli government by re-iterating "Washington's unwavering support for Israel's security". PM Bennett reportedly plans to continue policies of Netanyahu that opposed US return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In terms of trade, Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund 'ADQ' is in talks to invest USD500 million in Indian e-commerce platform 'Flipkart'. Meanwhile mangoes from Indian states of West Bengal and Bihar are being displayed at a week-long mango promotion programme in Bahrain.

In a development of great impact for Indian Muslims, Saudi Arabia has once again barred foreign travellers from performing Hajj this year, owing to concerns over spread of COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 60,000 fully vaccinated pilgrims residing in Saudi Arabia alone will be allowed to perform the Hajj.

The sixth round of Vienna talks between JCPOA signatories and Iran began on June 12. The United States and Iran have made considerable progress in their indirect talks, yet a final agreement still remains elusive. Reportedly, even after two months of negotiations the "Biden administration remains unsure whether they are any closer to final agreement than they were at the beginning". On its part,

"Iran has shown willingness to reverse steps in violation of the JCPOA 2015 including the limits on the quality and quantity of uranium enrichment it can undertake. Tehran is reportedly prepared to decommission newly deployed sophisticated centrifuges and dispose the more highly enriched product that they have produced". One of the sticking points in the talks appears to be that, "Iran wants assurance from the Biden administration that US re-entry into the JCPOA would not be reversed, and sanctions would not be imposed by a future administration". Meanwhile the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has urged Iran to provide information on uranium traces found at undeclared sites in the country without further delay.

The United States has sanctioned a smuggling network that includes an Indian national Manoj Sabharwal residing in UAE, who helped fund Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

'Yossi Cohen' has been replaced by 'David Barnea' as the new Director of the 'Mossad'. As Cohen retired, he shed light on some of the major operations conducted under his watch including blowing up Iran's underground centrifuge facility at Natanz, 2018 operation in which the Mossad stole Iran's nuclear archive, and the assassination of nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

On the security front, Russian President Putin has rejected US media report that Moscow plans to give Iran a 'Kanopus-V satellite' with a high-resolution camera which would vastly improve Iran's spying capabilities and allow Tehran to monitor the facilities of its adversaries across the Middle East. In another development, a secret Israeli cyber firm 'Quadream' led by a former Israeli military intelligence officer is selling phone-hacking technology to Saudi Arabia that allows clients a "zero-click" hack (direct break into phones without any interaction from the target, and without leaving any visible traces) into a targets iphone.

Further, the Biden administration is pushing UAE to remove 'Huawei' equipment from its telecommunications network within next four years – before Abu Dhabi is scheduled to get F-35 fighter aircraft in 2026 or 2027. Meanwhile the UAE has been elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) beginning January 1, 2022.

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

Bahrain

[Week-long Indian Mango Promotion Begins in Bahrain](#)

June 11, 2021, ANI News

A week-long Mango promotion programme began on Friday (June 11) in Bahrain where 16 varieties of the fruit, including three GI certified 'Khirsapati' and 'Lakshmanbhog' from West Bengal and Zardalu from Bihar are being displayed.

Egypt

[Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey Deporting Uyghurs to China, Report Says](#)

June 09, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have been named among the countries that are deporting Uyghur Muslims to China, raising concerns about Beijing's growing reach.

[Egypt's Transition Away from American Weapons is a National Security Issue](#)

May 25, 2021, Defence News

Egypt announced an agreement in May with France to purchase 30 French-made F3-R Rafale fighter jets in a deal reportedly worth \$5 billion. The agreement is part of a larger trend in which Egypt is purchasing fewer weapons from the United States and more from Russia and France.

[Apple's New Encrypted Browsing Feature won't be Available in Egypt, China, Saudi Arabia and more](#)

June 08, 2021, Tech Crunch

Apple announced a handful of privacy-focused updates at its annual software developer conference on Monday (June 08). Private Relay won't be available in China alongside Belarus, Colombia, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkmenistan, Uganda and the Philippines.

Iraq

[Long Legal Battle Awaits Four Kerala Women Who Joined ISIS](#)

June 12, 2021, The Week

There will be no homecoming for the four Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) brides from Kerala who are lodged in a prison in Afghanistan. But India will not be the first country to refuse entry to women who married ISIS fighters. Britain and France have both taken a strong stand to prevent these women from coming home.

[US offers \\$3 Million for Information on Iraq Attacks](#)

June 10, 2021, Arab News

The US Department of State's Rewards for Justice programme said it was offering a reward of up to USD3 million for information on attacks against Americans in Iraq. The announcement comes a day after an attack was carried out with three "explosive-laden" drones on Baghdad airport, where US troops are deployed.

[No Serious Damage or Casualties from Iraq Rocket Attacks - US State Dept](#)

June 11, 2021, Reuters

There was no serious damage or casualties from rocket attacks on Wednesday (June 09) that hit two sites in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad where U.S. contractors were present, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

[China Likens Lab Leak Momentum to U.S. 'Hyping Up' Weapons of Mass Destruction Ahead of Iraq War](#)

June 10, 2021, Newsweek

China called into question the validity of America's push for looking into the possibility that COVID-19 originated in a lab by relating it to the conversations that were happening ahead of the Iraq War.

[BP Considers Spinning Off Iraq Operations](#)

June 11, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

BP PLC is working on a plan to spin off its operations in Iraq into a stand-alone company, according to people familiar with the matter, as the oil giant shuffles its assets and investment plans in its pivot toward lower-carbon energy.

[Iraq Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul-Jabbar Ismail Says Gas Sector a Priority](#)

June 12, 2021, Business Standard

Iraq's oil sector is rebounding after a catastrophic year triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, with key investment projects on the horizon, Iraq's oil minister said.

Iran

[President Putin Denies Russia Plans to Give Iran Spy Satellite](#)

June 12, 2021, AL Jazeera

The Washington Post reported that Moscow is preparing to give Iran a Kanopus-V satellite with a high-resolution camera, allowing the Islamic republic to monitor the facilities of its adversaries across the Middle East. Russian President Putin has denied this media report.

[U.S., Iran Make Progress in Indirect Talks but as Sixth Round Begins, Final Agreement Still Elusive](#)

June 13, 2021, The Washington Post

Iran and the United States have made progress on virtually every issue under discussion in indirect meetings over the past two months. But as they began a sixth round of talks Saturday (June 12), the Biden administration remained unsure whether they are any closer to final agreement than they were at the beginning.

[U.S. Sanctions Indian National in Violation of Iran Sanctions](#)

June 11, 2021, The Hindu

Manoj Sabharwal - a UAE-based Indian national is part of a smuggling network that helps fund Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and the Houthis in Yemen, the Department of Treasury said.

[IAEA Urges Iran to Provide Information on Uranium Traces at Sites](#)

June 07, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran has failed to answer questions about the discovery of uranium particles at former undeclared sites in the country, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said, calling on Tehran to provide information "without further delay".

[Iran Regains UN Vote After US Enables UN Payment](#)

June 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iran regained its vote in the UN General Assembly after the United States enabled Tehran to use funds frozen in South Korea to pay some \$16 million it owed to the world body.

Israel

[Bennett Sworn in as Israel's Prime Minister, Unseating Netanyahu after 12 Years in Power](#)

June 13, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel's 36th government was sworn in at the Knesset on Sunday (June 13), installing Yamina chair 'Naftali Bennett' as Prime Minister and ousting Benjamin Netanyahu after 12 years of consecutive rule as premier.

[Prime Minister Narendra Modi Congratulates New Israeli PM Naftali Bennett](#)

June 14, 2021, The Indian Express

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Naftali Bennett on being sworn in as Israel's new prime minister, and said he looked forward to meeting him and deepening their countries' strategic partnership as they celebrate 30 years of the up-gradation of diplomatic ties next year.

[Bennett Plans to Continue Netanyahu's Iran Policies](#)

June 13, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Bennett plans to express strong opposition to a return to the Iran Deal and he will follow what Netanyahu has been doing on that matter.

[Ex-Mossad Chief Yossi Cohen Reveals Details of Mossad Operation in Iran](#)

June 12, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Former Mossad head Yossi Cohen revealed new details of the Mossad operation to steal Iran's nuclear archive, while arguing that his personal connection to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu helped Israel.

[Passing the Mossad Torch: Can David Barnea fill Yossi Cohen's Shoes?](#)

May 27, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Deputy Director of the Mossad, David Barnea has replaced Yossi Cohen as the new Director of the Israeli intelligence agency.

[Former Iranian President Ahmadinejad Claims Israel Infiltrated Iranian Intelligence](#)

June 12, 2021, Iran International

Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says the highest-ranking Iranian intelligence official in charge of countering Israeli spies in Iran was himself an agent of Israel. He did not name anyone nor specify the time period in question.

Jordan

[Jordan ex-Royal Court Chief Faces Trial over Alleged Monarchy Plot](#)

June 13, 2021, Reuters

Jordan's military court will start the trial next week of a former royal court chief and a minor royal on charges of agitating to destabilise the monarchy.

[Netanyahu Took Part in Effort with US, Saudi Arabia to Pressure Jordan](#)

June 12, 2021, The Times of Israel

According to a US media report, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was involved in efforts by the United States and Saudi Arabia to pressure Jordan's King Abdullah II as part of the Trump administration's promotion of its Middle East peace plan.

Kuwait

[India, Kuwait Sign Deal to Streamline Recruitment of Indian Domestic Workers](#)

June 11, 2021, Hindustan Times

India and Kuwait signed an agreement to streamline the recruitment of Indian domestic workers and discussed ways to boost cooperation in food security, cyber security and the energy sector during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Doha.

[External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar Holds Meeting with India's Envoys to Gulf Nations](#)

June 11, 2021, The Hindu

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has held a meeting with India's envoys to the Gulf nations to discuss a host of issues, including encouraging speedy resumption of flights to this region and facilitating reunion of families separated by Covid disruption.

[India 'Moved Mountains' to Contain Second Wave of COVID-19: EAM Tells Indians in Kuwait](#)

June 11, 2021, The Economic Times

Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar assured the worried diaspora in Kuwait that the second wave of COVID-19 was receding in India and the government "really moved mountains" to contain the pandemic.

Lebanon

[Lebanon Currency Drops to New Low as Financial Meltdown Deepens](#)

June 13, 2021, Reuters

Lebanon's currency crashed past a milestone on Sunday (June 13) reaching a new low against the dollar, as the country's financial meltdown and political deadlock linger. Market dealers said the Lebanese pound was trading at around 15,150 to the dollar, losing around 90% of what it was worth in late 2019.

Oman

[Oman's Youth Unemployment Problem is a Harbinger for Wider Gulf](#)

June 11, 2021, AL Jazeera

Unrest in Oman is a harbinger for other Gulf petro-states that need to diversify their economies to create jobs for legions of young people.

Qatar

[Qatar Sees a 22 Percent Growth in Trade Exchange with China](#)

May 25, 2021, Doha News

Qatar recorded a 22 percent increase in trade volume exchange with China during the first quarter of the year, according to statistics by the Planning and Statistics Authority. Trade volume between both countries hit 42.7 billion riyals in 2020.

Saudi Arabia

[Secretive Israeli Cyber Firm Selling Spy-Tech to Saudi Arabia](#)

June 08, 2021, Haaretz

Quadream, led by a former Israeli military intelligence official, and the phone-hacking tech was sold to Saudi Arabia. It allows clients a 'zero-click' hack into a target's iPhone.

[Hajj Hopefuls Saddened at Saudi Decision to Bar Foreign Pilgrims](#)

June 13, 2021, Deccan Chronicle

The Coronavirus pandemic once again upended the plans of millions of Muslims to make the pilgrimage. Saudi Arabia has barred foreign travellers from performing Hajj for the second consecutive year. A total of 60,000 vaccinated pilgrims residing in the kingdom will be allowed to perform the pilgrimage this year.

[Easing Restrictions Drive Middle East's Post-Pandemic Rebound, Says ICAEW](#)

June 13, 2021, Arab News

The Middle East's regional GDP will grow by 2.4 percent this year according to a report commissioned by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). It represents a similar rate to the region's average growth trajectory in the last decade, as countries double down on their pandemic exit strategies.

[Saudi Arabia and EU Bars Travelers Who Received Chinese-made Jabs](#)

May 31, 2021, TRT World

Despite its quick and responsive supply chain, Chinese vaccines are not seen as effective by the EU and Saudi Arabia. As some countries ease Covid-19 travel restrictions, Saudi Arabia and the European Union have barred travellers who have been vaccinated with Chinese vaccines, leaving out the biggest groups of foreign visitors in the regions.

[Saudi Arabia Still Biggest Buyer of French Arms Despite Paris Reduction of Weapons Export in 2020](#)

June 03, 2021, Press TV

Saudi Arabia imported more than \$850 billion worth of weapons from France last year, making it the biggest buyer of French arms even as the European country reduced its weapons exports, the French defense ministry says.

[Bangladesh Seeks Saudi Arabia's Help in Repatriation of Rohingya](#)

June 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Bangladesh has sought the cooperation of Saudi Arabia for a sustainable repatriation of Rohingya Muslims to their home country, Myanmar.

[OIC Chief Meets Chinese Envoy in Jeddah](#)

June 13, 2021, Arab News

During the meeting, Al-Othaimen and Weiqing discussed means to promote cooperation between the OIC and China.

Syria

[Syrian Hospital Hit in Artillery Attacks on Afrin, at least 13 Killed](#)

June 13, 2021, The Economic Times

At least 13 people were killed and several wounded in two separate artillery attacks on the northern Syrian town of Afrin on Saturday (June 12), local medical sources and Turkey's government said.

Turkey

[As Biden Meeting Nears, Erdogan Softens His Stance](#)

June 13, 2021, The New York Times

Turkish President Erdogan arrives in Brussels for a critical NATO meeting on Monday (June 14). Erdogan is facing a decidedly more sceptical Biden administration, as are other strongmen leaders once enabled by Mr. Trump.

[Erdogan Says Turkey Has Raised FX Swap Deal with China to \\$6 bn](#)

June 13, 2021, Reuters

President Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey's central bank had agreed with China to increase an existing currency swap facility to \$6 billion from \$2.4 billion, in a move that could boost foreign reserves.

[Turkey to Set up Consulate General in Chengdu, Open Cultural Center in Beijing amid Strengthened Trade and Cultural Ties](#)

May 28, 2021, Global Times

Turkey will establish a consulate general in Chengdu in Southwest China's Sichuan Province to expand its diplomatic presence in China, Turkish Ambassador to China Abdulkadir Emin Önen announced on Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo.

UAE

[UAE's ADQ to Invest \\$500 Million in Flipkart](#)

June 13, 2021, Mint

Abu Dhabi sovereign fund ADQ is in talks to invest about \$500 million in India's Flipkart, according to people familiar with the matter, as the Walmart Inc. backed e-commerce firm raises funds ahead of a potential initial public offering next year.

[The UAE is Elected to the UN Security Council](#)

June 11, 2021, Khaleej Times

The UAE has been elected unopposed to the UN Security Council for the 2022-2023 term by winning 179 votes out of the total 190 cast by the General Assembly members. The Emirates will replace Tunisia in the Asia-Pacific slot when the mandate begins on January 1, 2022.

[President Biden Prods UAE to Dump Huawei, Sowing Doubts on Key F-35 Sale](#)

June 11, 2021, Bloomberg

The U.S. is asking the UAE to remove Huawei equipment from its networks within the next four years -- before its scheduled to get the F-35 in 2026 or 2027 -- but Emirati officials have countered that they'd need longer plus an alternative that's as affordable.

[Israeli Minister Calls for Scrapping UAE Oil Pipeline Deal](#)

June 09, 2021, Oilprice.com

Israeli Minister of Environmental Protection Gila Gamliel is looking to have the recent oil pipeline deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) scrapped because of security and environmental concerns.

[Indian Trade Body Announces International Jewellery Fair in Dubai](#)

June 11, 2021, Jeweller

The International Gem & Jewellery Show (IGJS) Dubai is backed by India's Department of Commerce and the Indian Embassy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and will target buyers from the Middle East, China, Russia, the US, UK, Europe, Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Yemen

[Yemen Air-raids Halted to Boost Peace Efforts: Saudi-led Forces](#)

June 10, 2021, AL Jazeera

The Saudi Arabia-led coalition fighting the Houthi rebels in Yemen has said it has stopped carrying out attacks to pave the way for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. The move comes amid growing diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire agreement after more than six years of devastating war.



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