

DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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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 <u>click here</u>.

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Abstract

In an important development on the energy front, India has reportedly overhauled its petroleum reserve policy to enhance private participation in building new storage facilities. "Commercialisation of 'Strategic Petroleum Reserves' (SPRs) is a model similar to the one adopted by Japan and South Korea which allows private lessees, mostly oil majors, to re-export crude". New Delhi "plans to build strategic petroleum storage at Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur in Karnataka for around 6.5 million tonnes to provide an additional cover of 12 days of net oil imports". In another development, Indian Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri held talks with Kuwait's Oil Minister and "agreed to work towards further expanding the excellent bilateral engagement in the hydrocarbons sector".

Continuing a trend that emerged in 2014, US remained global leader in Petroleum and Natural Gas Production in 2020. U.S. Petroleum and Natural Gas output in 2020 totalled 66.9 quadrillion British thermal units (quads) which was more than Russia's 45.5 quads and Saudi Arabia's 26.5 quads.

Amid Taliban's surge in Afghanistan, over the last few weeks India and Iran have been in close contact to safeguard their strategic interests. Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif on July 21 over these developments. There are reports that a Cabinet level Indian minister may attend swearing-in ceremony of Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi on August 05.

Northern Cyprus (Turkish Cypriot) authorities announced partial reopening of the abandoned town of 'Varosha'. "It has been deserted since 1974 war that split the island of Cyprus, a military zone nobody has been allowed to enter". The latest development comes amid Turkish President Erdogan's visit to breakaway Northern Cyprus where he announced the "beginning of a new era in Maras (Varosha) that will benefit everyone". This has prompted a backlash from Greek Cypriots who view it as an indirect land grab by Turkey. India expressed concern about this unilateral announcement by Turkey and stressed that New Delhi has always "advocated peaceful resolution of this issue in accordance with the UN resolution". "Unfortunately, the voice of the UNSC as reflected in its presidential statement of 9th Oct 2020 has not been adhered". It added "India has consistently supported the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of the Republic of Cyprus".

Gold is a major commodity in India's import-export basket with the UAE. India's gold exports are soaring with "gold exports posting an impressive 1800 per cent jump to USD 1.16 billion during April-May this year from a meagre USD 61.29

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million in the same period last year". Meanwhile, Indian Commerce and Industry minister Piyush Goyal revealed that, New Delhi is in "talks with 16 countries, including the UAE, UK, European Union (EU), Australia, and Canada for trade agreements". In another development, non-resident Indian businessman 'Yusuff Ali MA' has been appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the board of 'Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry' (ADCCI).

US President Biden will host Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the White House on July 26. In the backdrop of US withdrawal from Afghanistan, "attaining a more concrete timeline for the withdrawal of US "combat" troops from Iraq will be at the top of discussion agenda". Pentagon officials stressed that "they will be pulling out a small unspecified number from the 2500 American troops stationed in Iraq". In another development, US condemned a blast in Baghdad by ISIS that claimed 30 lives and left dozens injured.

On the US-Iran relations, Washington is reportedly considering new sanctions on Iranian oil export to China as a way to pressure Tehran to commit to a nuclear deal. The future of Vienna talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) remains uncertain as sources have pointed toward Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi's intent to start afresh with his administration's own terms and conditions. The new Iranian government may even demand that they would like to "keep the 60 percent enrichment or chain of advanced centrifuges and not dismantle them as demanded by Washington".

Amid growing tensions between Israel and Iran, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have asked for an increased budget to prepare for a potential military strike on Iran's nuclear programme.

On the cyber security front, Israeli company NSO Group's CEO Shalev Hulio asserted that "Israeli cyber sector is under attack" and the latest affair involving NSO "Pegasus spyware" is the "creation of Qatar or the BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) movement – maybe both". NSO group does not maintain any lists of targets, "If anyone uses our software to spy on journalists, they won't be a customer anymore", he added. Meanwhile Saudi Aramco revealed a data leak after hackers demanded USD 50 million ransom.

As Russia unveiled its new Sukhoi stealth fighter 'Checkmate', Moscow "expects 300 orders for this aircraft over the next 15 years mainly from the Middle East, Asia, and South America".

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



Bahrain

King Fahd Causeway Boosts KSA-Bahrain Non-Oil Trade by 18 Percent in Q2

July 18, 2021, Arab News

Non-oil trade between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain rose 18 percent to \$781 million during the second quarter of this year, compared to a year earlier as more trucks crossed the King Fahd Causeway.



Egypt

<u>Chinese FM Wang Yi Meets Egyptian President, Highly Appreciates Prospect on</u> <u>Mutual Counter-terrorism, Anti-COVID Efforts and BRI</u>

July 19, 2021, Global Times

China firmly supports Egypt in pursuing an independent foreign policy and its efforts to counter terrorism, maintain stability and de-radicalization, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said during his meeting with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi on Sunday (July 18).

US Warns Egypt Over Crackdown on Rights Activists

July 15, 2021, France 24

The United States warned Egypt not to target rights campaigners after a prominent activist was indicted, saying the issue would be a factor in arms sales to the ally.



Iraq

US Sharply Condemns 'Vicious Act of Terrorism' in Baghdad

July 21, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The US State Department issued a terse denunciation after a terror attack in Iraq's capital claimed the lives of 30 victims, and left dozens injured.

Iraq Doesn't Need United States' Combat Troops: PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi

July 25, 2021, The Economic Times

"There is no need for any foreign combat forces on Iraqi soil," said Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi, falling short of announcing a deadline for a U.S. troop departure. Iraq's security forces and army are capable of defending the country without U.S.-led coalition troops, he said.

U.S. to Announce Troop Drawdown from Iraq, but Little is Expected to Change

July 24, 2021, The New York Times

Iraq's Prime Minister is heading to Washington to demand that President Biden withdraw all U.S. combat troops from Iraq, announcing to Iraqi media that the visit would "put an end to the presence of combat forces."

Coalition Says Iraq Base Housing US Troops Hit in Drone Attack

July 24, 2021, AL Jazeera

A military base in northern Iraq that hosts United States troops has been hit in a rocket attack, the latest to target Washington's presence in the country.

India Overhauls Petroleum Reserve Policy to Boost Private Interest: Report

July 23, 2021, Mint

India has decided to commercialise half of its current strategic petroleum reserves (SPRs) as the nation looks to enhance private participation in the building of new storage facilities, two government sources said.

Oil Major Exodus in Iraq Creates Opportunity for China

July 05, 2021, Oilprice.com

After less than 20 years since the US invasion of Iraq, there seems to be an almost complete exodus of US oil companies in Iraq – demotivated and eager to exploit other opportunities, they all have sought to let go of the Iraqi dream.



Iran

US Considering New Sanctions on Iranian Oil Sales to China

July 19, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States is weighing new sanctions on Iran's oil sales to China as a way to pressure Tehran to commit to a nuclear deal.

<u>With President-elect Raisi's Plans 'Murky,' Iran Nuclear Talks Strained as Well as</u> <u>Stalled</u>

July 24, 2021, Iran International

Iranian officials suggested that a new negotiation team could be appointed by Raisi to start afresh in Vienna. "They want their own terms and conditions, and they have more demands like keeping the 60 percent enrichment or chain of advanced centrifuges and not dismantling them as demanded by Washington.

Iran Opens Oil Terminal to Bypass Strategic Strait of Hormuz

July 22, 2021, AL Jazeera

Outgoing President Hassan Rouhani has said Iran opened its first oil terminal in the Gulf of Oman, a move that will allow it to avoid using the Strait of Hormuz shipping route that has been a focus of regional tension for decades.

Iranian Agents Facing Charges for Their Role in a Plot to Kidnap a U.S. Journalist

July 14, 2021, NPR

Federal prosecutors in New York charged five foreign agents backed by the Iranian government for their roles in a plot to kidnap a U.S. citizen and journalist critical of the nation's regime.

Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Iran Foreign Minister Talk Ties in Context of Afghan Conflict

July 21, 2021, Mint

Indian foreign minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif on Wednesday (July 21) against the backdrop of intense fighting raging between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Afghanistan. Volume III, Issue 30 | July 26, 2021



India to Attend New Iran President's Inauguration on August 5

July 24, 2021, The Economic Times

India will attend the inauguration of Iranian president elect Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran on August 5 amid growing coordination between New Delhi and Tehran over Afghan developments.

<u>'Diplomatic Relations will be Resumed between Saudi Arabia and Iran Soon,' Says</u> <u>Report</u>

July 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Saudi Arabia may send a representative to participate in the swearing-in ceremony for Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, Iranian newspaper Etemad reported. The source confirmed that the Iranian and Saudi embassies would be reopened in both countries in the near future.

Iran Orders Week-long Shutdown in Tehran Amid Fifth COVID Wave

July 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iran imposed a one-week lockdown in the capital and a nearby province as daily COVID-19 caseloads hit a record high amid a fifth wave of the pandemic.



Israel

'Israeli Cyber Sector is Under Attack,' Says NSO Group Chief

July 23, 2021, Israel Hayom

NSO Group co-founder and CEO Shalev Hulio says the latest affair was created by "Qatar or the BDS movement - maybe both," and stresses that NSO Group does not maintain lists of targets. "If anyone uses our software to spy on journalists, they won't be a customer anymore."

IDF Asks for Budget Increase to Prepare Potential Attack against Iran's Nuclear Programme: Report

July 15, 2021, WION

As Iran engages with Western powers over reviewing the 2015 nuclear deal, Israeli media reported that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have asked for a major budget increase to prepare for a potential attack against Iran's nuclear programme.

Lapid and Gantz Said to Warn US: Iran is Close to Nuclear Threshold

July 25, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli authorities have warned US officials in recent days that Iran is closer than ever to attaining nuclear weapons.

<u>Shaked's Yamina Party to Leave Israeli Coalition Government if Settlement Freeze</u> <u>is Agreed</u>

July 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Israeli Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked has confirmed that her Yamina party will leave the coalition government if it agrees to a request from the Biden administration to implement a building freeze in West Bank settlements.

Israel 'Celebrates' Return to African Union

July 23, 2021, Middle East Monitor

After nearly two decades of trying, Israel has finally been granted observer status at the African Union, the Foreign Ministry confirmed.

Russia Upgrades Syrian Air-defense against Israeli Strikes: Report

July 24, 2021, Daily Sabah

Russia is moving to curtail Israeli airstrikes on Syria by strengthening Bashar al-Assad's missile defense systems. Volume III, Issue 30 | July 26, 2021



Syria Accuses Israel of New Attack After China Promises Support

July 19, 2021, Newsweek

Syria has accused Israel of launching a new attack on the country shortly after China pledged additional support for the war-torn Arab nation that Beijing views as important for its economic footprint in the Middle East.

Israeli Airlines Start Direct Flights to Morocco After Improved Ties

July 25, 2021, Reuters

Two Israeli carriers launched nonstop commercial flights to Marrakesh from Tel Aviv following the upgrading of diplomatic relations last year between Morocco and Israel.

Israel Launches Commission to Probe Pegasus Spyware: Legislator

July 22, 2021, AL Jazeera

Israel has established a commission to review allegations that NSO Group's controversial Pegasus phone surveillance software was misused.



Jordan

President Biden Calls Jordan King a Loyal Ally in 'Tough Neighborhood'

July 20, 2021, Associated Press

President Joe Biden praised King Abdullah II of Jordan as a stalwart ally in a "tough neighborhood" as the two leaders huddled at the White House on Monday (July 19), a meeting that came at a pivotal moment for both leaders in the Middle East.

Jordan-Israel Relations to Hinge on West Bank Tensions

July 23, 2021, The Arab Weekly

Jordan and Israel have taken new steps to boost bilateral relations and restore channels of communication following the era of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that was marked with tension and stasis.



Kuwait

China, Afghanistan Top Blinken's Agenda on India, Kuwait Trip

July 23, 2021, US News

The trip comes as the Biden administration seeks to shore up U.S. leadership in vaccinating the world against COVID-19, tries to blunt increasing Chinese assertiveness, and moves to evacuate vulnerable people from Afghanistan before the U.S. military withdrawal is complete.

Indian Petroleum Minister Holds Talks with Kuwait's Oil Minister

July 22, 2021, Official Twitter Handle Hardeep Singh Puri

India and Kuwait agreed to work towards further expanding the excellent bilateral engagement in the hydrocarbons sector.

Kuwait's Amir, Crown Prince, Premier Condole with India on Deadly Floods

July 24, 2021, Kuwait Times

Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has addressed a cable of condolences to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind expressing deep condolences and sincere solace on death of people in the floods that ravaged the Indian State of Maharashtra.



Lebanon

Lebanese Sunni Leaders Endorse Mikati to Form New Government

July 25, 2021, AL Jazeera

Former Lebanese premier Najib Mikati is on course to become Lebanon's prime minister-designate after receiving the endorsement of Lebanese Sunni leaders.

Iraq to Sell Lebanon 1 Mil mt/year of Heavy Fuel Oil in Barter Deal

July 25, 2021, S&P Global

Iraq has agreed to sell Lebanon 1 million mt/year of heavy fuel oil in return for "goods and services" in a barter deal that should help OPEC's second-biggest producer reduce a surplus of fuel oil while enabling cash-strapped Lebanon to obtain the commodity needed for power plants.



Oman

Oman's Sohar Port and Freezone offers Indian Businesses Huge Opportunities

July 13, 2021, Times of Oman

Sohar Port and Freezone, in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), has launched a series of five online webinars to explore opportunities between Sohar and the Indian market in key industries such as food, automotive, plastics and metals.



Qatar

Qatar's Amir Sends Condolences to President, Prime Minister of India on Floods

July 25, 2021, The Peninsula Qatar

The Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani sent a cable of condolences to President of the Republic of India Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister of the Republic of India Narendra Modi on the victims of the floods in India.

Qatar-China Ties in Best Period in History: Chinese Ambassador to Doha

July 20, 2021, The Peninsula Qatar

The Ambassador of China to Qatar, H.E. Zhou Jian, has said that Qatar and China relations have been elevated in the last few years. Last year and in the first quarter of this year, China became the largest trading partner of Qatar, marking the best period in the history of our bilateral ties.



Saudi Arabia

New Russian Fighter Jet Sukhoi 'Checkmate' Has Mideast Orders in Sights

July 23, 2021, Arab News

Mideast governments could figure among customers for Russia's new Sukhoi stealth fighter jet, a top Rostec executive said.

Saudi Aramco Confirms Data Leak After Reports of Cyber Ransom

July 21, 2021, AL Jazeera

Saudi Aramco confirmed that some company files were leaked after hackers reportedly demanded a \$50 million ransom from the world's most-valuable oil producer.

Democrats Call for DOJ, FBI to Declassify 9/11 Intelligence Related to Saudi Arabia

July 07, 2021, The Hill

A group of Senate Democrats are repeating demands for the Justice Department and FBI to release key information about the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that victims hope to use to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for alleged involvement.

20 Years After 9/11, Lawsuit Against Saudis Hits Key Moment

July 06, 2021, Associated Press

As the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks approaches, victims' relatives are pressing the courts to answer what they see as lingering questions about the Saudi government's role.

<u>United States Continued to Lead Global Petroleum and Natural Gas Production in</u> 2020

July 19, 2021, US Energy Information Administration

More petroleum and natural gas was produced in the United States than in any other country during 2020 (a trend that began in 2014), despite year-on-year declines from the record-high production in 2019. U.S. petroleum and natural gas output in 2020 totalled 66.9 quadrillion British thermal units (quads).

Chinese Car Makers Move into High Gear in Saudi Arabia

July 23, 2021, China Daily

Chinese cars are becoming increasingly popular in Saudi Arabia, with passenger and commercial vehicle sales booming in recent years.

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China's Oil imports from Saudi Arabia Fall 19% in June, Remains Top Supplier

July 20, 2021, The Times of India

China slowed crude oil purchases in the second quarter amid rising global oil prices and shrinking refining margins. Its imports in the first half fell for the first time year-on-year since 2013.

Saudi Arabia: International Umrah to Resume from August 10

July 25, 2021, The Siasat Daily

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced the resumption of Umrah service for pilgrims worldwide from August 10, 2021, following a successful Hajj season.



Syria

Syria Reports Israeli Airstrikes in Northern Aleppo Province

July 20, 2021, The Indian Express

Syria's air defences intercepted an Israeli attack on Al-Safirah area of southern Aleppo, Syrian state media reported, a location where Israel has repeatedly hit a growing Iranian presence.



Turkey

Turkey Readies Part of Cyprus Ghost-town for Civilian Use

July 22, 2021, Middle East Monitor

"A new era will begin in Maras which will benefit everyone," said Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, who visited breakaway Northern Cyprus on Tuesday. Maras is the Turkish name for 'Varosha'.

India Backs Cyprus on Varosha Issue; Calls Turkey-backed Move 'concerning'

July 22, 2021, WION

India has backed Cyprus and expressed its deep concern on a Turkey-backed move to open the ghost town of Varosha. Varosha was once a popular resort town but was abandoned after the 1974 invasion of the Mediterranean island by Turkey.

Turkey Condoles with India Over Deadly Floods

July 25, 2021, Hurriyet News

Turkey on July 24 extended its condolences to India over the loss of lives in recent floods and landslides in the western Maharashtra state.

Turkey, Israel Want to Improve Ties After Presidents' Call: AKP

July 14, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkey and Israel agreed to work towards improving their strained relations after a rare phone call between their presidents, a spokesman for Turkey's ruling AK Party said.

Turkish Shipbuilder Front Runner in Bangladesh Frigate Program

July 25, 2021, Daily Sabah

The Bangladesh Navy is one step closer to finalizing its multibillion-dollar frigate program, which foresees the construction of multirole capable guided-missile frigates at the country's Chattogram Dry Dock with technical cooperation from a foreign naval shipbuilder, in which Turkey is a candidate and likely front runner.



UAE

NRI Businessman Yusuff Ali MA Selected to the Board of Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry

July 25, 2021, The New Indian Express

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi & Dy. Supreme Commander of UAE Armed Forces issued a resolution to form a new Board of Directors for Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ADCCI), chaired by Abdullah Mohamed Al Mazrouei and prominent Indian businessman Yusuff Ali MA as the vice-chairman.

India's Gold Trade Soars as Pandemic Recovery Continues

July 21, 2021, Arabian Business

Gold seems to be shining again for Indian exporters as the country's exports of the yellow metal posted a massive 1,800 percent jump to \$1.16 billion during April-May period of this year from a meagre \$61.29 million in the same period last year.

'Foreign investment in India at Historic High, Streak to Continue': Piyush Goyal

July 24, 2021, Hindustan Times

Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal talked about the "historic highs" of the country's foreign investment in the last seven years. India is in talks with 16 countries, including the UK, the EU, Australia, Canada, and the UAE, for trade agreements.

Israel Partially Freezes UAE Oil Pipeline Deal Over Environmental Concerns

July 25, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel's Environmental Protection Ministry said that it was delaying implementation of a proposed oil transport deal with the United Arab Emirates, freezing a project that has angered environmentalists.

Bennett and UAE Crown Prince Discuss Bilateral Ties in First Call

July 23, 2021, The Times of Israel

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke with United Arab Emirates Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, in his first call with the de facto ruler of the Gulf kingdom since becoming prime minister.



Yemen

'Most Fierce' Houthi Assault on Marib Foiled by Yemen Government, Coalition

July 25, 2021, Arab News

Yemeni government troops and allied tribesmen, backed by Arab coalition jets, on Sunday (July 25) pushed back the "biggest and most fierce" Houthi assault in the central province of Marib since February.

Both Political Settlement, Military Solution Remain Elusive in Yemen

July 24, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The inconclusive military operations in Yemen's Bayda province, south of the capital Sana'a and in the Marib province, east of the capital, have shown that there is no military solution to the violence that has been raging in the country.



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