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DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

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Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Sanket Joshi at sanket@dpg.org.in.

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Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.
www.delhipolicygroup.org
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Abstract

Chief of the Army Staff Gen. MM Naravane met Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Chief Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi and also laid a wreath at the Indian Soldiers War Memorial in Jerusalem paying homage to the soldiers who made supreme sacrifices during World War. Indian Army Chief’s visit was aimed at further strengthening bilateral defence cooperation.

Indian Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri inaugurated the Petroleum and Natural Gas Week at the India pavilion in Dubai Expo 2020. In his address Minister Puri stressed that “As India’s economy grows from USD 3 to 5 trillion by 2025, India will shape the future of energy demand... and it expects UAE to play an important role in meeting those demands”. On the issue of rising crude prices, Indian Petroleum Minister reminded OPEC+ that “they could take advantage of high oil prices for a while, but in the process if they undermine [global] economic recovery it will rebound and haunt them in other sectors”. “This is not an issue of lack of supplies; there are 5 million barrels per day of [oil] supplies that has not been released for whatever reason”, he added. Taming soaring oil prices could be an area of cooperation between China and United States. Release of oil from Chinese strategic reserves was reportedly discussed during the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden.

In an important and far-reaching development, satellite images revealed construction of secret Chinese military facility at UAE’s Khalifa Port. After timely US intervention, the UAE authorities asked Beijing to halt the development of the military facility. Reacting to this, Abu Dhabi clarified that “the UAE has never had an agreement, plan, talks or intention to host a Chinese military base or outpost of any kind”.

India’s Reliance Industries (RIL) has scrapped a plan to sell 20 percent stake in its O2C business (oil to chemicals) to Saudi Aramco. Meanwhile, Bahrain-based investment fund ‘Investcorp’ reiterated its intent of expanding presence in India with assets worth USD 2 billion under management over the next few years. Currently, Investcorp has invested USD 500 million across Indian private equity and real-estate. In another development, Oman’s Ambassador in New Delhi called on India to invest in port infrastructure and Special Economic Zones of Oman to achieve Muscat’s Vision 2040.
In a positive development, Iran’s Chabahar port is witnessing “increased goods traffic to Afghanistan after Taliban assured India that they want good diplomatic and trade relations. Taliban also stressed that they support Chabahar’s role in facilitating regional and global trade”.

On the security front, US Defence Secretary Austin reassured US allies in the Middle East of America’s continuing commitment to the region. Meanwhile, Secretary Austin speaking in Bahrain asserted that “the United States remains committed in preventing Iran from building nuclear weapons. However, “if Iran isn’t willing to engage seriously, then we will look at all options necessary to keep the United States secure”, Austin added. Amidst this, a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) revealed that “Iran’s highly enriched Uranium stockpile now consists of 113.8 kg (251 lbs) of 20 percent uranium - up from 84.3 (186 lbs) in September”. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 2015 had restricted Iran’s Uranium enrichment to 3.67 percent. In light of this, US Envoy for Iran Robert Malley warned Tehran that it was “risking making it impossible to gain any benefit from resuming the JCPOA”. Meanwhile, during talks with Israel, US revealed that it has “proposed an interim deal with Iran in which Tehran will suspend disallowed nuclear activities such as enriching uranium to 60 percent, in exchange for US and its allies releasing some frozen funds or issuing sanctions waiver on humanitarian grounds”.

On US-Israel relations, Washington warned Israel that its “attacks on Iranian nuclear program are counterproductive as Tehran has rebuilt an even more efficient Uranium enrichment system”. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom seeks to declare whole of Palestinian militant group that controls Gaza ‘Hamas’ as a terrorist organisation. UK has already designated military wing of Hamas as a terrorist outfit.

As noted in earlier issues of West Asia Review, Qatar had shown interest in purchasing F-35 fighter aircrafts from the United States. Washington is looking into Qatar’s request highlighting Doha as an “exceptional partner” in the region. Meanwhile, US Senators including Republicans Rand Paul, Mike Lee, and Democrat Bernie Sanders have issued a joint resolution opposing proposed sale of arms worth USD 650 million to Saudi Arabia.

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

**Investcorp Plans To Expand Operations in India**
November 17, 2021, Mint

Bahrain-based Investcorp, which has so far invested $500 million across private equity and real estate deals in India, plans to expand its presence with $2 billion in assets under management (AUM) over the next few years.

**US Defence Secretary Pledges To Counter Iran During Bahrain Visit**
November 20, 2021, AL Jazeera

US Defence Secretary has pledged to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, as negotiations remain stalled over Tehran’s tattered atomic deal with world powers, in comments that appeared aimed at reassuring the US’s Gulf Arab allies.

**Bahrain Asserts Partnership with US, UK, Bolstering Peace with Israel**
November 21, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa commended the United States' role in consolidating the region’s security, stability, and peace.
Egypt

Russia Unveils Master Plan For Creation of Its Industrial Zone in Egypt — Ministry
November 16, 2021, TASS (Russian News Agency)

The master plan for the creation of Russia’s industrial zone in Egypt has been presented in that country, the press service of the Industry and Trade Ministry told TASS.
Iraq

**Shia Cleric, Sadr, Eyes National Majority Government in Iraq**

November 18, 2021, Middle East Monitor

"The whole world has witnessed that the elections were held in a transparent manner. We have two ways before us, either to form a national majority government or to form a national opposition," Muqtada Al-Sadr, a Shia cleric, said at a press conference in Najaf city in southern Iraq.

**Iraq May Open Doors To Indian Tea After 10-Year Hiatus**

November 08, 2021, The Economic Times

The Baghdad Chamber of Commerce has invited Indian tea companies to participate in the first tea festival in Iraq which will be held at the end of this month.

**US Defense Secretary Reaffirms Commitment To Withdraw US Combat Troops From Iraq**

November 21, 2021, AL Arabiya

The US will uphold its commitments to withdraw all troops with a combat role from Iraq by the end of the year, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said.
Iran

Chabahar Sees Increase in Traffic as Taliban Backs Trade Via Port
November 21, 2021, The Times of India
The Chabahar port in Iran developed by India seems to be resuming normal operations after assurances by the Taliban that they want good diplomatic and trade ties with India and that they were going to support the role of the port in facilitating regional and global trade.

US Envoy Warns 'Time is Short' For Restoring Iran Nuke Deal
November 19, 2021, The Times of Israel
The United States envoy for Iran warned that Tehran was approaching the point of no return for reviving the nuclear deal after it boosted its stocks of enriched uranium before talks resume this month.

New IAEA Report Says Iran Has Boosted Stockpile of Highly Enriched Uranium
November 17, 2021, The Times of Israel
The total amount of highly enriched Uranium with Iran now includes 113.8 kg (251 lbs) enriched to 20 percent, up from 84.3 (186 lbs) in September, and 17.7 kg (39 lbs) enriched up to 60 percent, up from 10 kg (22 lbs), the report says.

As Hopes for Nuclear Deal Fade, Iran Rebuilds and Risks Grow
With Iran’s new administration preparing for its first international nuclear negotiations, there are signs that there will be no going back to the 2015 agreement.

US Said To Raise Proposed Interim Deal With Iran in Talks With Israel
November 17, 2021, The Times of Israel
The US sources said the proposal was for Iran to suspend a disallowed nuclear activity such as enriching uranium to 60 percent, in exchange for the US and allied countries releasing some frozen Iranian money, or issuing sanctions waivers on humanitarian goods.
IRGC Navy Chief: Much of The News of Iran-U.S. Clashes in Persian Gulf Not Released

November 21, 2021, Tehran Times

IRGC Navy Commander Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said on that there have been numerous one-on-one clashes between Iran and the U.S. in the Persian Gulf, but many were not reported.

US Sanctions Iranian Nationals, Company For Alleged Vote Meddling

November 18, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States has sanctioned six Iranian nationals and an Iranian cyber company for “attempting to influence” last year’s US presidential elections.

Iran’s Mahan Air Foils Cyberattack, Flights Operating On Schedule

November 21, 2021, Press TV (Iran)

Iran’s Mahan Air has announced it foiled a cyberattack targeting the company’s “internal systems” and that all flights were operating on schedule.

Iran’s Caspian Gas Field, And Russia’s Share, ‘Far Bigger Than Expected’

November 16, 2021, Iran International

The lucrative Chalous gas field in the Caspian Sea looks increasingly to be at the center of discussions underway over an Iran-Russia 20-year cooperation deal.
Israel

Indian Military Chief Tours Israel, Receives Briefing on Security Threats
November 19, 2021, Jewish News Syndicate
Chief of the Army Staff Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane observed Israel’s northern borders and also paid tribute to Indian army casualties that fell during World War I.

Israel PM Naftali Bennett Likely To Visit India Next Year, Says Israeli Ambassador
November 17, 2021, Deccan Chronicle
Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is set to visit India next year and both countries are working on the tentative dates, Israel’s Ambassador to India said.

Israeli Defence Minister Gantz’s House Cleaner Accused of Trying To Spy For Iran
November 17, 2021, The Times of Israel
An Israeli man who worked as a house cleaner for Defense Minister Benny Gantz was arrested earlier this month for allegedly offering to spy on the minister on behalf of Iran, the Shin Bet security service said.

Hamas Gunman Kills 1, Wounds 4 In Terror Shooting in Old City of Jerusalem
November 21, 2021, The Times of Israel
A Hamas gunman opened fire in the alleyways of Jerusalem’s Old City on Sunday morning (November 21), killing one Israeli man and wounding four others, two of them seriously, Israeli officials said.

Hamas To Be Declared a Terrorist Group by UK
November 20, 2021, BBC News
UK’s Home Secretary Priti Patel has announced she is seeking to declare the whole of Palestinian militant group Hamas a terrorist organisation. The military wing of the group which controls Gaza is already designated as a terrorist organisation by the UK.

US Warns Israel Attacks On Iran Nuclear Program Are Counterproductive
November 22, 2021, The Times of Israel
US officials have warned Israel that attacks against the Iranian nuclear program are counterproductive and have caused Tehran to rebuild an even more efficient enrichment system.
In First, Herzog Speaks To China's Xi on Iran, Abraham Accords

November 17, 2021, The Times of Israel

In the first-ever phone conversation between the Presidents of Israel and China, Isaac Herzog spoke with Xi Jinping, discussing Iran's nuclear program, the Abraham Accords and bilateral ties.

Palestinian Authority Spokesperson: This Israel Gov't is Worse Than Previous Ones

November 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Israeli government headed by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has proven to be worse than previous governments, the spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority presidency has said.

US Ambassador to UN Calls on Israeli Defence Minister Gantz To Stop Settlement Activities

November 17, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, met Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz and urged him to stop settlement activities. Thomas-Greenfield also pledged to replenish Israel’s Iron Dome missile defence system. "We will support Israel's ability to defend itself", the Ambassador added.
Jordan

Israel, Jordan To Sign UAE-Mediated Energy and Water Agreement
November 17, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Israel and Jordan are set next week to sign a cooperation agreement in the areas of energy and water in the United Arab Emirates, which it helped mediate.
Kuwait

Indian Envoy Visits Kuwaiti Naval Base

November 18, 2021, Kuwait Times

Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George visited Muhammad Al-Ahmad Kuwait Naval Base and met Commander of Kuwait Naval Forces Brigadier General Hazza Mutlaq Al-Alati. Both sides reviewed the ongoing cooperation between the two countries and ways of further deepening the engagement including in maritime areas.

OMC To Help Maids From Tamil Nadu Find Jobs in Kuwait

November 21, 2021, The Times of India

Those seeking employment as domestic help in foreign countries can now hope for a secure workplace environment, with the Overseas Manpower Corporation (OMC) of the State Labour department taking measures to ensure their rights and safety.
Lebanon

Kuwait Detains 18 Suspected of Financing Lebanon’s Hezbollah

November 19, 2021, Arab News

Prosecutors in Kuwait have detained 18 people suspected of financing Lebanon’s powerful Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah.
Oman

'Oman Desires India’s Partnership in Materialising Its Vision-2040'

November 18, 2021, The Economic Times

Oman has launched Vision: 2040 to transform its economy. It desires strong Indian investments across sectors including port infrastructure and Special Economic Zones, Hamed Saif AL Rawahi, Ambassador of Oman to India said.
Qatar

US 'Looking Closely' Into Qatar's F-35 Request, Official Says

November 17, 2021, Middle East Eye

A US State Department official has said that Washington is looking into Qatar's request to purchase F-35 fighter jets, highlighting that Doha is an "exceptional partner" in the region.

One Year To Go, Qatar 2022: First “FIFA World Cup” in The Middle East and Arab World

November 20, 2021, FIFA

On 21 November 2022, the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab World will begin as the world’s best national teams meet in Qatar.
Saudi Arabia

RIL Withdraws NCLT Application For O2C Hiveoff, To Start Fresh Talks with Saudi Aramco For Stake Sale
November 20, 2021, The Economic Times
Reliance Industries has dropped plans to hive off its oil-to-chemicals (O2C) business, intended as part of a potential stake sale to Saudi Aramco, making way for fresh negotiations between the two companies.

US Asks China To Release Oil Reserves As Part of Discussions on Economic Cooperation, Source Says
November 17, 2021, South China Morning Post
The issue of China joining the United States in releasing crude oil reserves was raised during the virtual meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden.

US Senators Move To Block $650m Arms Sale To Saudi Arabia
November 19, 2021, Reuters
A joint resolution of disapproval to block a proposed $650 million in U.S. arms sales to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was introduced by Republicans Rand Paul and Mike Lee, as well as Bernie Sanders who caucuses with Democrats.

Saudi Arabia Has No Interest In The S-400, Says Russian Industry Official
November 18, 2021, Middle East Monitor
Viktor Kladov, who leads Rostec's international cooperation and regional policy department, said Saudi Arabia has moved on now that it is set to receive the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system.

Saudi PIF Nearly Triples U.S. Stock Holdings; Adds Walmart, Pinterest
November 15, 2021, Reuters
The Public Investment Fund (PIF), Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, nearly tripled its holdings of U.S.-listed stocks to $43.45 billion in the third quarter, adding shares of Alibaba Group, Walmart (WMT.N) and Pinterest (PINS.N).
Syria

US Says Iran Attacked Al-Tanf in Retaliation to Israel's Raids

November 20, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

A few days ahead of resuming nuclear negotiations with Iran, the light was once again shed on last month's drone attack against the US military base at Al-Tanf, located within the Syrian-Iraqi-Jordanian border triangle. The drone attack on the remote US outpost in southern Syria was allegedly an Iranian retaliation for Israeli airstrikes in Syria.

Iran-Syria Ties Stronger Than Ever

November 21, 2021, Tehran Times

With the civil war in Syria grinding to a halt by the day, some Arab states have moved from totally blockading the Syrian government to exploring avenues for repairing ties with Damascus.

Saudi, Syrian Intelligence Chiefs Meet in Cairo

November 15, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The directors of Saudi Arabia and Syria's intelligence agencies are reported to have met in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, signalling greater cooperation between Riyadh and Damascus.
Turkey

**Turkey-Israel Continued Dialogue ’Mutually Beneficial’: Erdogan**

November 18, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has held a rare phone conversation with his Israeli counterpart, Isaac Herzog, saying the continuation of dialogue between the two countries is in the common interest.

**Israeli Couple Arrive Home After Being Held in Turkish Prison as Suspected Spies**

November 18, 2021, The Times of Israel

An Israeli couple held in Turkey for suspected espionage after photographing the President’s palace was set free early, returning to Israel on a private jet sent by the government to bring them home.

**Abu Dhabi Crown Prince To Visit Turkey After Years of Tension – Officials**

November 15, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE's de facto ruler, will visit Turkey for the first time in years, as the regional rivals work to repair frayed relations, two Turkish officials said.
UAE

'Outstanding Discussions' with UAE, Says Indian Oil Minister

November 17, 2021, Gulf News

Indian oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri said he had “outstanding” discussions with UAE counterparts on oil prices.

China Halts Work on Military Base In UAE After US Intervention: Report

November 21, 2021, WION

China has halted the work on a military base in the UAE after the intervention of the United States. Earlier, US media had reported that China was constructing a military facility on a secret port in the Emirates.

UAE-Israel Ties Under The Spotlight Amid Emirati Outreach To Iran

November 20, 2021, Tehran Times

Two days after a senior Emirati official vowed to de-escalate tensions with Tehran, reportedly a high-level Emirati delegation will visit Iran soon. Citing Iranian and Persian Gulf officials, Reuters said the visit comes as the UAE works to de-escalate tensions with Iran.

UAE Could Explore India's Low-cost Launch Vehicles To Lift-off Small Satellites

October 28, 2021, India Today

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) could use low-cost launch vehicles developed by the Indian Space and Research Organisation (ISRO) for lifting off its small satellites.
Yemen

Houthi Rebels Say Drone Attacks Target Several Saudi Cities
November 20, 2021, AL Jazeera

Yemen’s Houthi fighters said they fired 14 drones at several Saudi cities, including at Saudi Aramco facilities in Jeddah, with the Saudi state news agency reporting that the Saudi-led coalition attacked 13 targets in Yemen during a military operation against the group.

Yemen’s Houthis Re-Enter Hodeidah After Gov’t-Allied Forces Leave
November 14, 2021, AL Jazeera

Forces loyal to Yemen’s internationally recognised government have withdrawn from the strategic port city of Hodeidah, allowing Houthi rebels to retake key positions there, Yemeni officials and the United Nations said.