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

India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar concluded five-day visit to Israel on October 21. In his meeting with Israel’s leadership, Dr. Jaishankar agreed to resume negotiations for India-Israel free trade agreement (FTA) from November 2021, the two nations also agreed on mutual recognition of each other’s COVID vaccine certificates. Further, India welcomed Israel as the newest member of Gurugram-based International Solar Alliance (ISA). Dr. Jaishankar also met Indian Air Force’ contingent participating in Blue Flag exercise, highlighting defence and security as the key pillars of India-Israel partnership. In an important development, India, Israel, US, and UAE held their first quadrilateral dialogue focusing on closer economic cooperation for infrastructure development in the fields of transportation, technology, maritime security, and trade. The “New Quartet” has decided to establish a four-member international forum for this purpose.

In another significant development, Dubai (United Arab Emirates) has signed a MoU to build infrastructure including industrial parks, IT and multi-purpose towers, logistics centres, medical college and a speciality hospital in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan’s former Ambassador to New Delhi Abdul Basit termed this as a “major success for India and a setback for PM Imran Khan-led Pakistani government”. Amb. Basit expressed concerns about OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) nations signing MoUs with India, arguing that “everything is now one-sided and Islamabad has ceded ground to India”.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed CEOs of global oil and gas companies. He spoke about New Delhi’s goal of achieving self-sufficiency (Aatmanirbharta) in the oil and gas sector while inviting global companies to partner and develop India’s oil and gas sector. Further, in the backdrop of Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited’ (ISPRL) plans to sell 2.17 million barrels crude oil each to HPCL and MRPL by December 2021, PM Modi spoke about shift in focus from “revenue to production maximization”. He emphasised the “need to enhance storage facilities for crude oil”. Amidst prevailing global energy shortages, India has asked Qatar for 50 cargoes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) which New Delhi had earlier deemed too expansive. In another development, India’s Reliance Industries (RIL) has passed a resolution to appoint Saudi Aramco’s Chairman ‘Yasir Al-Rumayyan’ as an independent director on its board.
Ahead of United Nations Glasgow Climate Change Conference (COP26), Saudi Arabia “pledged to cut carbon emissions to net-zero by 2060, while also maintaining its role as a leading producer of oil and gas”. Riyadh is pushing fellow oil-producing countries to “present a united front in Glasgow in opposing rising calls for a reduction in fossil-fuel investment that could further push up energy prices”.

As regards trade and economy, Taliban has reportedly asked Iran to facilitate Afghan trade cargoes including fresh and dry fruits export to India via Chabahar port. In another development, amidst India’s ongoing campaign against illicit drug trafficking, New Delhi and Tehran agreed to enhance mutual cooperation to stop influx of Heroin and Methamphetamine.

On US-Iran relations, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi called upon the United States to lift sanctions imposed on his country as a sign of Washington’s seriousness toward resuming Vienna talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Earlier, European Union’s official revealed that Iran was not ready to resume Vienna talks, but was willing to discuss text of the agreement from previous round of negotiations in Brussels. In light of this, United States made it clear that “intermediate step of meeting in Brussels was not necessary for resumption of talks in Vienna”. Amidst continued uncertainty on JCPOA, Israel reportedly approved budget of USD 1.5 billion to prepare the IDF for a potential military strike on Iranian nuclear sites.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi. As noted in earlier issues of West Asia Review, Moscow had stepped in to stop repeated Israeli air-strikes in Syria; however in a recent meeting President Putin reportedly assured Tel Aviv that “Russia will not hinder Israeli air-strikes in Syria”. In the past, Israel has allegedly carried out scores of air-strikes in Syria targeting Iranian military presence.

On US-Israel relations, Washington has demanded an explanation from Israel about terror-listing of six Palestinian NGOs who according to Israeli Defence Minister “effectively operated as an arm for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terror group”. Israel however stressed that “US knew about outlawing Palestinian civil groups”. Further, in first such announcement in the Biden era, Israel announced construction of more than 1,200 settlement homes in occupied West Bank (Palestinian territory). President Biden has opposed settlement expansion in West Bank since he took office in January 2021.
Turkey-West ties deteriorated further as President Erdogan told his Foreign Minister to expel Ambassadors of the United States and nine other countries including Canada, France, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden for demanding the release of philanthropist Osman Kavala. In a joint statement, these countries had called for a speedy and just resolution to Kavala’s case and his urgent release. Mr. Kavala is in prison since 2017 charged with financing nationwide protests in 2013 and alleged involvement in failed coup against President Erdogan in 2016. In another major development, Turkey has been added to Financial Action Task Force’ (FATF) grey list.

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

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE Reiterate Support For Bahrain's Fiscal Programme

October 20, 2021, Reuters

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates reiterated their support for Bahrain's plans to balance its budget, a move expected to help their neighbour in the debt capital markets despite delays in plans to fix its heavily indebted finances.
Egypt

Egypt, China’s Sinovac Discuss Cooperation to Provide Vaccines to Africa

October 22, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

Egypt seeks to expand cooperation with China’s Sinovac to become the company’s main hub to export vaccines to African countries.

Egypt, Russia Launch Joint Drill to Enhance Military Cooperation

October 22, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

Egypt has strengthened its remarkable military cooperation with Russia by launching a new military drill including elements of the Egyptian paratroopers and the Russian Airborne Forces.

Moscow Interested in Developing its Partnership with Egypt, Russian Ambassador to Cairo

October 21, 2021, Egypt Today

Russian Ambassador to Cairo said that his country is interested in developing its partnership with Egypt, as well as cooperating to solve the crisis in Libya, Palestine, and fight all forms of terrorism.
Iraq

Iraq, India Among 11 ‘Countries of Concern’: US Intel Report on Climate Change
October 24, 2021, India Today

The US report identifies Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iraq, North Korea, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Colombia as particular “countries of concern”. Heat, drought, water availability and ineffective government make Afghanistan specifically worrying. Water disputes are also a key geopolitical flashpoint in India and the rest of South Asia.

‘He Lied’: Iraqis Blame Colin Powell For Role in Invasion of Iraq
October 18, 2021, AL Jazeera

Word of Colin Powell’s death at age 84 dredged up feelings of anger in Iraq toward the former US Secretary of State, one of several Bush administration officials whom they hold responsible for a disastrous US-led invasion that led to decades of death, chaos and violence in Iraq.

CIA’s New China Mission Center Takes a Page From America’s Cold War Playbook
October 21, 2021, People’s Daily

People’s Daily argued that, for decades, the CIA, with its overreaching and omnipresent tentacles, has carried out its despicable spying mission in the name of protecting America’s national security including in Iraq. It drew similarities between the US invasion of Iraq and ongoing attempts at COVID-19 origin tracing.

UK Ends Investigation Into Military Abuses in Iraq, Making No Prosecutions
October 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

All investigations into the war crimes and abuses committed by British soldiers in Iraq have now been closed, without resulting in any prosecutions.
Iran

Narcotics Control Agencies' Heads of India-Iran Hold Bilateral Meet To Fight Drug Influx

October 13, 2021, Republic World

Both nations have committed their increased co-operation in the fight against the influx of Heroin and Methamphetamine.

Taliban Asks Iran to Facilitate Afghan Dry Fruits Export to India Through Chabahar

October 13, 2021, The Times of India

Reportedly Tehran has agreed to evaluate Taliban's proposals for the transportation of Afghanistan's trade cargoes and export of fresh and dried fruits to India via Chabahar port.

US Should Lift Sanctions To Prove It Wants Talks

October 19, 2021, The Indian Express

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi said that the United States should lift sanctions imposed on his country to prove it is serious about restarting stalled nuclear talks in Vienna.

US Says 'Intermediate Step' of Meeting in Brussels Not Necessary For Resumption of Iran Talks

October 18, 2021, Reuters

The United States does not think talks in Brussels are necessary before the resumption of indirect negotiations with Iran on a return to the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

EU Plays Down Chance of Any Iran Talks Outside Vienna

October 18, 2021, Reuters

The European Union played down the prospects of serious talks on Iran's nuclear programme outside the framework of negotiations between world powers and Iran in Vienna, with the EU's foreign policy chief saying time was not on Iran's side.
IAEA Director-General: Monitoring ‘No Longer Intact’ at Iran Site Allegedly Hit by Israel

October 24, 2021, The Times of Israel

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said the watchdog’s monitoring program in Iran is no longer “intact” after Tehran refused requests to repair surveillance equipment damaged in a June attack on an Iranian nuclear site that has been blamed on Israel.
Israel

Israel, India to Resume Free Trade Talks
October 18, 2021, The Jerusalem Post
Israel and India intend to sign a free-trade agreement by the middle of 2022, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and his Indian counterpart, Dr. S. Jaishankar, announced.

‘India-Israel-UAE-U.S. Quad To Focus on Economic Cooperation Says Israeli Envoy
October 19, 2021, The Hindu
The newly announced quadrilateral meeting between India-Israel-UAE-U.S. is a forum for economic cooperation for the moment, said Israel’s Deputy Chief of Mission Rony Yedidia-Clein, adding that more cooperation and high-level visits would follow as Israel and India mark 30 years of full diplomatic ties in 2022.

Infrastructure Projects in Transport, Technology in Focus at First Meeting of ‘New Quad’
October 19, 2021, Hindustan Times
The first meeting of the foreign ministers of India, Israel, the US and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) decided to establish an international forum for economic cooperation and discussed joint infrastructure projects in transportation and technology.

Israel Said To Approve $1.5 Billion Budget for Potential Strike on Iran
October 19, 2021, The Times of Israel
Israel has approved a budget of some 5 billion new Israeli Shekels ($1.5 billion) to be used to prepare the military for a potential strike against Iran’s nuclear program.

Iran Warns Israel Must Wait For ‘Shocking’ Response as Tel Aviv Makes Open Military Threats
October 24, 2021, Tehran Times
Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said that the Zionist regime must be worried about Iran’s “shocking response” as Israel’s threats of military attacks against Iran has reached an alarming level.
US Demands Israel Explain Terror Listing of Palestinian NGOs

October 22, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz had announced that half a dozen civil society groups were being designated as terror organizations, saying that they had effectively operated as an arm for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terror group.

In 1st in Biden Era, Israel Advances Construction of Over 1,300 Settlement Homes in the West Bank

October 24, 2021, The Times of Israel

“Tenders for 1,355 homes in Judea and Samaria have been published,” a ministry statement said, using the West Bank’s biblical name. The homes are slated to be built in seven settlements, including 729 in Ariel, 346 in Beit El, 102 in Elkana and 96 in Adam.

US Returns To UN Rights Council After 3-Year Absence, Says It Will Defend Israel

October 14, 2021, The Times of Israel

The United States is returning to the United Nations Human Rights Council three-and-a-half years after its dramatic walk-out — time seized upon by China to assert wider influence in the world body.

Confrontation With Iran is ‘A Matter of Time’, Israel's Lieberman Says

October 22, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Israel’s Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that “conflict” was the only way to stop Iran from reaching nuclear capability, claiming that “a confrontation with Iran is only a matter of time, and not a lot of time.”

Hamas Hails Malaysia’s Rejection of Normalisation With Israel

October 21, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement hailed Malaysia’s rejection of normalisation of ties with Israel.

Israel in Talks with Muslim Majority Comoros to Establish Ties

October 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Comoros is a Muslim-majority island based in the Indian Ocean, between Madagascar and the mainland countries of Mozambique and Tanzania. It is the only Arab country entirely in the Southern Hemisphere and a member of the Arab League.
Jordan

**Jordan Blasts Israel After 1,300 Apartments Approved For Sale in West Bank Settlements**

October 24, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Jordan slammed Israel saying it “rejects and condemns” plans to build 1,355 housing units in the West Bank. Last week, the US expressed concern about Israeli plans to build 3,000 new homes in settlements, as well as the legalization of two illegal outposts.
Kuwait

100 Countries Support China on Human Rights Amid US-led Smears at UN Session

October 22, 2021, Global Times

Kuwait, on behalf of three Gulf countries, made a joint statement to support China and said that to deal with human rights issues, countries should abide by principles of objectiveness without politicization, the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
Lebanon

Nasrallah Warns Israel Against Searching For Gas in Disputed Maritime Region
October 23, 2021, The Times of Israel
Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned Israel against unilaterally searching for natural gas in a disputed maritime region before any agreement between Lebanon and Israel is reached.

US Mediator Urges Quick Talks on Lebanon-Israel Maritime Borders
October 22, 2021, The Arab Weekly
The US mediator for indirect talks on border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel said that the negotiations he was hoping to revive should be concluded in a short period if they were to succeed.

Hezbollah: Christian Forces Party Seeks Civil War in Lebanon
October 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor
The Lebanese Christian Forces party is seeking to drag the country into a civil war, Hezbollah chief, Hasan Nasrallah said.
Oman

First Factory To Open at China-Oman Industrial City in Duqm

October 23, 2021, Times of Oman

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm celebrates next week the opening of the first factory in the China-Oman Industrial City in Duqm.
**Qatar**

**Qatar Energy Says It Is Committed To Being Trusted Supplier To India**

October 21, 2021, Reuters

Top liquefied natural gas exporter Qatar Energy said it remains committed to being a trusted partner for energy supplies in India and does not miss shipments it is contractually obligated to deliver.

**India Asks Qatar for 50 Cargoes it Deemed Too Expensive in 2015**

October 21, 2021, Business Standard

The global energy shortage has prompted India to ask Qatar, the world’s biggest supplier of liquefied natural gas, for around 50 cargoes it deemed too expensive six years ago.
Saudi Arabia

Ahead of COP26, Saudi Arabia Resists Calls to Cut Oil Investment


Saudi Arabia is pushing fellow oil producers to present a united front at climate talks that start this month and oppose rising calls for a reduction in fossil-fuel investment, arguing that such a move could further push up energy prices.

Saudi Arabia Pledges 2060 Net Zero Carbon Emission Target Ahead of COP26 Summit

October 23, 2021, Financial Times

Saudi Arabia has pledged to cut carbon emissions to net-zero by 2060, while also maintaining its role as a leading producer of oil and gas, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said in a speech.

Indian PM Modi Meets CEOs of Global Oil Companies, Calls For Increasing Storage Facilities

October 20, 2021, Mint

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke about the need to enhance storage facilities for crude oil during his virtual meeting with the chief executives of global oil majors.

RIL Shareholders Pass Resolution to Add Saudi Aramco Chairman as Director

October 21, 2021, Business Standard

Reliance Industries Ltd said that a required majority of its shareholders have passed the resolution to appoint Saudi Aramco Chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan as an independent director to the conglomerate's board.

Saudi Arabia to Use $110 Billion Natural Gas Project for Blue Hydrogen

October 24, 2021, Moneycontrol

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman said that a major portion of gas from the $110 billion Jafurah development will be used for blue hydrogen.

Saudi Foreign Minister, US Special Envoy to Iran Discuss Nuclear Talks

October 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

They discussed “the importance of strengthening joint action to stop Iranian support for terrorist militias that threaten the security and stability of the Middle East and the world”.
**Mike Pompeo Reveals Saudi Conditions To Normalise Ties With Israel**

October 18, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Former US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, revealed that Saudi Arabia wants the US to adopt a tougher stance against Iran in order to normalise its ties with Israel.

**Saudi Ambassador to UN: Israel Robbed Palestinians of Their Most Basic Rights**

October 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Saudi Arabia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Abdullah Bin Yahya Al-Mouallimi, slammed Israel, saying that it has "robbed the Palestinian people of their most basic rights".

**China is Removing Domes from Mosques as Part of a Push To Make Them More 'Chinese'**

October 24, 2021, NPR

"The [Chinese] government says they want us to 'sinify' our mosques, so they look more like Beijing’s Tiananmen Square," says Ali, a Muslim farmer selling pomegranates outside the Dongguan Great Mosque in Xining, China.
Syria

Israel Says Russia Agreed To Not Hamper IDF Air Campaign Over Syria
October 22, 2021, The Times of Israel
Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed during their meeting in Sochi that the two nations would continue to implement the so-called deconfliction mechanism that works to prevent Israeli and Russian forces from clashing in Syria, a senior Israeli official said.

Israeli Missiles Said To Target Syrian Forces Near Golan Heights Border
October 25, 2021, The Times of Israel
An Israeli aircraft fired two missiles at Syrian forces based near Israel’s border on the Golan Heights early Monday (October 25), Arabic reports said.

Senior Al-Qaida Leader Killed in US Airstrike in Syria
October 23, 2021, Hindustan Times
The US military conducted an airstrike that killed senior al Qaida leader Abdul Hamid al-Matar in northwest Syria, Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson Major John Rigsbee said.

‘Big Disappointment’ Over Lack of Syria Constitution Agreement
October 22, 2021, UN News
The process of drafting a new constitution for Syria has been “a big disappointment” UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen concluded, following the end of discussions in Geneva, a consensus on how to move forward was not achieved, he added.
Turkey

**Turkey Joins Pakistan in FATF Grey List in a Double Blow for Islamabad**

October 22, 2021, The Economic Times

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has retained Pakistan on its grey list and added its ally Turkey to the list, in a double blow for Islamabad which depended on Ankara’s support to avoid entry into the blacklist earlier. Jordan and Mali were also added to the grey list.

**Turkey To Expel U.S. Envoy and Nine Others, President Erdogan Says**

October 24, 2021, Reuters

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that he had told his foreign ministry to expel the ambassadors of the United States and nine other Western countries for demanding the release of philanthropist Osman Kavala.

**President Erdogan's Critics Say Expulsion Call is Diversion From Economic Woe**

October 25, 2021, Reuters

President Tayyip Erdogan's political opponents said that his call to expel the ambassadors of 10 Western allies was a bid to divert attention from Turkey's economic difficulties, while diplomats hoped the expulsions might yet be averted.

**US Says It Made No Financing Offers To Turkey On F-16 Jets**

October 18, 2021, Reuters

The United States on Monday did not confirm Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's comment that Washington had made an offer to Ankara for the sale of F-16 fighter jets but added that it has not made Turkey a financing offer for the warplanes.

**Russian President Putin and Turkish President Erdogan Supports Reforming UN Security Council**

October 22, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has said that something needs to be done to make the UN Security Council "more balanced". President Putin noted that he would not like to destroy the UN foundation, adding that the veto right is "the whole point of the UN today".
UAE

Dubai Signs Deal to Build Infrastructure in Kashmir

October 18, 2021, Reuters

Dubai Has Signed an Accord To Build Infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian government said.

Dubai's Investment in Jammu & Kashmir "a Major Success for India": Former Pakistan Ambassador Abdul Basit

October 22, 2021, The Economic Times

Pakistan's former envoy to India Abdul Basit has said the Government of Dubai signing an MoU with the administration of Jammu and Kashmir for promoting industrial development in the Union Territory is "a major success for India" and a setback to Prime Minister Imran Khan's foreign policy.

UAE Assures Energy Supplies to India to Meet Growing Energy Demand

October 21, 2021, The Economic Times

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) vowed to meet India's growing energy demand, saying it will remain the nation's trusted partner of choice.

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Discusses Syria with President Bashar al-Assad

October 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the United Arab Emirates' de facto ruler, discussed developments in Syria and the Middle East with Syria's President, Bashar Al-Assad.
Yemen

Saudi-led Coalition Says It Killed More Than 260 Yemen Rebels

October 24, 2021, AL Jazeera

More than 260 Houthi rebels were killed in fighting over the past three days near Yemen’s strategic city of Marib, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition said.