



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

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Tunisian president suspends parliament; takes over executive powers

Tunisia's President Kais Saied suspended the parliament, dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and took over the executive powers and supervision of public prosecution. He also invoked the emergency powers under Article 80 of the constitution which allows the president to take "necessary measures" when the country is "in a state of imminent danger." The announcements followed violent protests in several cities against the deterioration of the country's health, economic and social situation. Tunisian President said that he took these steps as he had to save Tunisia from corruption and plots to sow civil strife at a time when the country's economy is weak and it is struggling with the worst outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tunisian Parliament Speaker and head of the Ennahda Party, Rached Ghannouchi, accused President Saied of launching "a coup against the revolution and constitution" and urged him to return to democracy in Tunisia. Saied's supporters have appreciated the move and huge crowds were seen in the streets in support of Saied.

US announces new sanctions on Syria

The US has announced a new list of sanctions on Syria targeting officials and organisations linked to killing civilians and violating human rights in the country. The new sanctions include eight Syrian prisons – Saydnaya Military Prison and seven other prisons operated by the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate and Syrian Military Intelligence for violation of human rights. The US has imposed sanctions on Saraya Al Areen – a militia affiliated with the Syrian

Army that participated in the 2020 military operation to recapture Idlib. Ahrar Al Sharqiya, an armed Syrian opposition group that has integrated numerous former Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) members into its ranks, has also come under the US sanctions.

Saudi Arabia and UAE reach a compromise deal in OPEC standoff

After a two-week long spat, Saudi Arabia and UAE have reached a compromise deal over oil production quota in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Saudi Arabia has now agreed to UAE's request to have a higher baseline – from the existing 3.17 million barrels per day to 3.5 million barrels day though it demanded its base line to be increased to 3.8 barrels a day. The agreement will boost OPEC's oil output by 400,000 barrels a day each month from August, continuing until all of its halted output has been revived. The deal will also give UAE and several other countries higher baselines against which their production cuts are measured. Earlier, UAE had opposed extending the existing deal until December 2022 from April 2022 unless it was granted a higher production quota.

Najib Mikati named as Lebanon's new Prime Minister

Najib Mikati has been appointed the new prime minister of Lebanon, following parliamentary consultations with President Michel Aoun. Mikati received support of 72 out of the 128 members of parliament, including members from Hezbollah. The new appointment was made following Saad Hariri's resignation on July 15, 2021, as a result of President Aoun's refusal to accept conditions proposed by Saad Hariri. A key

reason for Hariri's failure to form a government was Aoun's repeated rejection of the names put forward by him to be included in the cabinet. However, Mikati has stated that President Aoun has approved most of the names proposed by him to be part of the government.

Omani Sultan visits Saudi Arabia

Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said of Oman, accompanied by a high-level delegation of ministers and officials, visited Saudi Arabia on his first official overseas trip since assuming power last year. Sultan Haitham met with King Salman and both the leaders discussed ways to further enhance Oman-Saudi relations, situation in Yemen, Iranian nuclear and missile programme among other regional issues. During his visit both the countries signed a MoU establishing the Omani-Saudi Coordination Council that seeks to further strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. Omani Sultan presented King Salman with the Order of Al Said, the highest accolade in Oman, while King Salman conferred the Order of King Abdul Aziz on Sultan Haitham.

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince visits Saudi Arabia

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, visited Saudi Arabia and met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Both the leaders discussed bilateral cooperation and acceleration of joint efforts to further enhance ties between them. They reviewed the recent regional and international developments and emphasised on maintaining peace and stability in the region. They also discussed and agreed to further deepen the strategic cooperation between

them. The visit comes in the aftermath of both the countries reaching a compromise deal over oil production quota in the OPEC.

US to withdraw combat troops from Iraq by year end

The US and Iraq have signed an agreement regarding withdrawal of American combat troops from Iraq. The agreement was signed in Washington as Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al Kadhimi visited US and met with President Joe Biden in the White House. There are currently 2,500 US troops in Iraq focused on fighting the remnants of the ISIS in the country. However, the US would continue to focus on logistics, maintenance of equipment and helping Iraqi forces further develop their intelligence and surveillance capabilities. Iraq is facing politically delicate time and this development is seen as a victory domestically in Baghdad.

Israeli Prime Minister meet with King of Jordan

Israeli Prime Minister Neftali Bennett secretly met with King Abdullah II of Jordan in the first week of July 2021. The report of the meeting was later confirmed by Jordanian king during an interview with *CNN* on July 25, 2021. The meeting was important because Israeli prime minister met with the King of Jordan for the first time in five years. While the details were not made public, the meeting can be seen as a step to improve Israel's relations with Jordan. The news about the secret meeting came after Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid met with his Jordanian counterpart, Ayman Safadi, during which a deal was signed between the two countries to supply 50 million cubic meters of water to Jordan from Israel.

Jordan's King visits US

King Abdullah II of Jordan visited US and met with President Joe Biden on July 19, 2021. During the meeting, both the leaders discussed defence ties between the two countries, and Abdullah sought the support of US for modernising Jordan's fleet of F-16 fighter jets to strengthen the Jordanian armed forces. Both the leaders discussed the ways to further enhance peace and stability in the West Asian region. With respect to Palestine, Biden expressed his strong support for a two-state solution of the longstanding issue. Furthermore, Biden stressed on enhancing the cooperation between Jordan and the new Israeli government.

Qatari foreign minister visits Iran

Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani visited Tehran and discussed bilateral relations with the Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi. Later, Raisi stated that his government's priority in foreign policy will be relations with neighbours; and said that Tehran puts special emphasis on relations with Doha. Qatar had expressed its willingness to broker talks between Iran and its Arab neighbours in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia. Al Thani also met with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif and emphasized on the need for an open and transparent dialogue between GCC countries and Iran, as a precondition to achieve stability in the region.

Indian Navy continues *Operation Sankalp* in the Gulf of Oman

As per the official statement released by the Indian Navy, *Operation Sankalp* has deployed 23 warships till date and has provided safe passage to an average 16

Indian-flagged merchant vessels in the Gulf region every day. The naval operation started in June 2019 after there were explosions on board two oil tanker ships in the Gulf of Oman amid increased tensions between Iran and the US. Since then, Indian Navy deployed a Ship with an integral helicopter in the north-west Arabian Sea off Ras al Hadd, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf in order to instill confidence in Indian maritime community. It also aims to show presence and provide assistance to Indian-flagged merchant vessels passing through the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

Jaishankar discusses bilateral and regional issues with Zarif in Tehran

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Iran and met with Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Both the leaders discussed bilateral ties as well as important regional issues such as the nuclear talks in Vienna, transportation cooperation, including cooperation in the Chabahar Port and the situation in Afghanistan. Referred to the talks between Afghan government and the Taliban groups in Tehran, Jaishankar appreciated Iran's efforts to bring close the viewpoints of both sides. Both India and Iran have expressed concerns about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and have called for strengthening intra-Afghan dialogue to find a comprehensive political solution against the backdrop of withdrawal of US forces from the country.