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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

# WEST ASIA DIGEST

*Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia*

- **India launches “Operation Dost” in Türkiye and Syria**
- **Saudi Foreign Minister meets Ukrainian President**
- **Oman opens its airspace to Israel**
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## **India launches “Operation Dost” in Türkiye and Syria**

India launched “Operation Dost” to help Türkiye and Syria deal with the destruction caused by a massive earthquake that struck both countries on February 6, 2023. India sent C-17 Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft with a specialised search and rescue (SAR) team to Türkiye within hours after the natural calamity. Under the operation, India provided necessary assistance for SAR efforts and medical assistance to deal with civilian casualties. India sent more than 250 personnel, specialised equipment and other relief material amounting to more than 135 tons to Türkiye on five C-17 IAF aircrafts. It included “three self-sustained teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) numbering more than 150 specially trained personnel, along with dog squads, specialised equipment, vehicles and supplies.” Till February 15, 2023, India had sent ₹7 crore worth of relief material to both Syria and Turkey as a part of Operation Dost. With regards to Syria, more than 6 tons of emergency relief assistance was delivered through a C130J aircraft to Damascus, comprising medicines for emergency use, fluids for hydration, protective gear, general use medicines and medical equipment like ECG machine, patient monitor etc. In addition, an Indian Army team was deployed in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) between Syrian and Israeli borders.

## **Saudi Foreign Minister meets Ukrainian President**

The Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan visited Ukraine and met with President Volodymyr Zelensky. The two countries signed an agreement and a memorandum of understanding (MoU), amounting to US\$ 400 million. The MoU includes financing oil derivatives worth

US\$ 300 million as a grant from the government of Saudi Arabia through the Saudi Fund for Development in favour of Ukraine. The agreement also included a joint cooperation programme to provide humanitarian aid from the Kingdom to Ukraine, amounting to US\$ 100 million. The Saudi foreign minister reiterated the Kingdom’s support for all international efforts at resolving the Ukraine-Russia crisis politically. He also expressed support for all efforts that contributed to the de-escalation and protection of civilians.

## **Oman opens its airspace to Israel**

On February 23, 2023, Oman opened its airspace for Israeli Airlines and became the second Gulf country after Saudi Arabia to provide an air corridor to all Israeli civilian planes. However, neither of the Gulf States formally recognise Israel. The talks regarding the same started during President Biden’s visit to the West Asian region. Oman's Civil Aviation Authority said in a tweet that the decision was taken in accordance with obligations under the Chicago Convention of 1944. While talking about the development, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said that the decision is “historic” and will shorten the travel time to Asia and reduce transportation costs for Israelis.

## **India-Egypt Joint Working Group meeting on Counter-Terrorism**

India and Egypt held the third meeting of the Joint Working Group on counter-terrorism on February 16, 2023, in New Delhi. During the meeting, both sides reviewed threats posed by terrorist groups globally and in their respective countries and regions. They emphasised on taking action against all the UNSC-designated terrorist groups. Furthermore, the meeting “called upon all countries to work towards

rooting out terrorist networks, infrastructure, their financing channels and preventing cross-border movement of terrorists.” Both sides agreed on deepening the bilateral counter-terrorism collaboration and discussed ways to expand “multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation including in the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF).”

### **India participates in Exercise Desert Flag 8 in UAE**

India participated in the multilateral air exercise - Exercise Desert Flag 8 - which took place in the UAE. Exercise Desert Flag is a multilateral air exercise with participation from the air forces of the UAE, France, Kuwait, Australia, the UK, Bahrain, Morocco, Spain, the Republic of Korea and the US. For the first time, India’s indigenously made light combat aircraft Tejas participated in the exercise, reflecting India’s intent to showcase the jet on the world stage. An Indian Air Force (IAF) contingent of 110 Air Warriors arrived at Al Dhafra air base in the UAE to participate in the Exercise, in which five Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas and two C-17 Globemaster 3 aircraft would participate. The Exercise is scheduled from February 27 to March 17, 2023. According to the IAF, the objective of the Exercise is to participate in diverse fighter engagements and learn from the best practices of various air forces.

### **India-UAE Business Council launched**

On the first anniversary of the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the two countries launched the UAE chapter of their joint business chamber on February 18, 2023, to bolster economic ties and enhance bilateral trade and investment. The UIBC-UC was launched by Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi,

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade, in the presence of the Ambassador of India to the UAE, Sanjay Sudhir, Consul General of India in Dubai, Aman Puri, and founding members of the UBC-UC. Both countries aim to increase bilateral trade to US\$ 100 billion. India intends to attract US\$ 75 billion in investment from the UAE to India. Zeyoudi stated that the establishment of the Council marks a significant moment in the deepening of the relationship between the UAE and India. The Council brings together key partners and stakeholders from both nations and will serve as a valuable source of policy guidance, fostering innovative collaboration between Emirati and Indian businesses.

### **India, UAE and France establish a Trilateral Cooperation Initiative**

India, the UAE and France have established a trilateral cooperation which would focus on nuclear and solar power, climate change and biodiversity, along with cooperation in defence preparation and in countering infectious diseases. They declared the common intent to formalise a collaboration on nuclear energy and explore opportunities in the Indian Ocean Region. It was also agreed, in a joint statement, that “a range of trilateral events will be held in the backdrop of the Indian Presidency of the G20 and COP28 to be held in the UAE in November-December 2023.” The joint statement also declared an intent to cooperate in multilateral organisations such as World Health Organisation (WHO), Gavi – the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund, and Unitaid. They will also attempt to identify tangible cooperation in implementing the “One Health” approach, and support the development of local capacities in biomedical innovation and production within developing countries.