

# CLAWS Newsletter



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## About us

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) is an independent think tank based in New Delhi, India, dedicated to strategic studies and land warfare in the Indian context. Established in 2004 and registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, CLAWS operates as a membership-based organization governed by a Board of Governors and an Executive Council, under the Aegis of the Indian Army.

With a futuristic outlook and a policy-oriented approach, CLAWS focuses on national security issues, conventional military operations, and sub-conventional warfare. The Centre closely monitors regional conflicts and military developments within India's strategic frontiers, particularly in South Asia.

Committed to fostering strategic culture and informed policymaking, CLAWS disseminates its research to armed forces personnel, policymakers, members of the strategic community, and interested civilians. By facilitating in-depth studies and discussions, CLAWS contributes to shaping India's defense policies and military preparedness.

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The CLAWS Newsletter is a newly fortnightly series under the leadership of Dr. Tara Kartha, Director Research & Academics. The newsletter features insightful content curated by CLAWS researchers, each specializing in their respective verticals. This initiative aims to provide in-depth analysis, strategic insights, and updates on key issues.





## ABSTRACT

This edition of the CLAWS West Asia Dispatch presents a comprehensive account of key geopolitical developments across West Asia during the second fortnight of April 2025. It tracks major diplomatic engagements, security shifts, and regional realignments, while examining how the evolving multipolar order continues to shape India's extended neighbourhood.

The lead story this fortnight is the regional response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack in India and the subsequent escalation in Indo-Pakistani tensions. The Dispatch captures how key West Asian states reacted to the incident and its broader implications. On April 26, Iran suffered a major tragedy with a deadly explosion and fire at its primary port—an event analyzed here for its causes and consequences.

The issue also covers the state of Israel-Hamas negotiations, with recent developments in Cairo, and highlights significant defence-related activities in the region, including the UAE-hosted Desert Flag exercise, which saw Indian participation. Notably, India and Israel marked another milestone as the Barak MRSAM achieved a successful naval trial.

This fortnight's analysis features the strategic recalibration in Iran-Saudi ties, reflected in Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman's landmark visit to Tehran, and Iranian President Pezeshkian's outreach to Azerbaijan amid rising South Caucasus tensions.

The Dispatch also explores Iraq's preparations to host the 34th Arab League Summit—an event that underscores Baghdad's aspiration to reclaim diplomatic leadership in the region. At the same time, Syria's uneasy reintegration into Arab diplomacy, coupled with Iran's quiet military resurgence in post-Assad Syria, reflects deeper strategic rivalries shaping the future regional order. The edition also assesses India's high-level diplomatic engagements in West Asia, with a particular focus on Prime Minister Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia and its far-reaching outcomes for bilateral cooperation and regional positioning.

## Top Stories This Fortnight

### 1. West Asia Reacts to Pahalgam Attack as India-Pakistan Tensions Simmer *(April 22 onward, [CLAWS](#), [CLAWS](#))*

On April 22, a devastating tragedy unfolded in the Baisaran meadow of Pahalgam, Kashmir. A group of terrorists, reportedly linked to the Lashkar-e-Taiba group, launched a brutal attack, killing over two dozen male tourists. The incident shook the region and prompted an outpouring of grief and support from across the world. In particular, West Asia saw some countries being notably vocal in their solidarity with India. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Armenia quickly offered clear messages of condemnation and support for Indian authorities, while the rest of the region, including Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Palestine, Egypt, joined in expressing condolences and messages of condemnation. Notably, Syria and Azerbaijan were the only countries in the region that refrained from issuing such statements. As Indian authorities continue their investigation into the attack, connections to Pakistan have been established, resulting in heightened tensions between the two nations. In response to the escalating situation, Iran has offered to use its friendly ties with both countries to hold discussions towards deescalation.

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Aragchi emphasised Iran's readiness to mediate between the "brotherly neighbours," stating that both India and Pakistan have long-standing cultural and civilizational ties with Iran.

"India and Pakistan are brotherly neighbours of Iran, enjoying relations rooted in centuries-old cultural and civilizational ties. Like other neighbours, we consider them our foremost priority. Tehran stands ready to use its good offices in Islamabad and New Delhi to forge greater understanding at this difficult time," Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Aragchi said in a post on social media site X. He ended the post with lines from a 13th century Persian poem that broadly means that human beings are all connected and the pain of one is felt by all.

Saudi Arabia also echoed the call for de-escalation, urging both nations to avoid further conflict and seek diplomatic resolutions amidst growing tensions.

### 2. Turkey's Response and Actions Following the Pahalgam Attacks: A Closer Look *(April 22 onward, [Anadolu Ajansi](#), [Facebook/PakAirForce](#), [X/DailyTurkic](#), [X/DefenceAgency](#))*

Turkey's actions in light of the Pahalgam attacks have sparked considerable debate and raised eyebrows in India. Upon the news of the tragic incident, Turkey quickly issued a message of condolence and condemnation. However, as tensions between India and Pakistan escalated, rumors began circulating on social media, suggesting that a Turkish C-130 Hercules, a military cargo plane, had departed Ankara for Islamabad. Shortly thereafter, reports emerged claiming that six A400M aircraft, allegedly carrying military supplies like support for the Akıncı UCAV or TRG-230-UAV supersonic guided missiles, had left Ankara for Pakistan. These reports fueled outrage across social media platforms like X, prompting calls for Indian citizens to boycott tourism to Turkey.

In response, Turkey's Directorate of Communications promptly refuted these claims, clarify-



ing that while a Turkish cargo plane did land in Pakistan, it was solely for refueling purposes, dismissing any speculation about military support.

While the precise nature of the aircraft's journey remains unclear, Turkey's interactions with Pakistan in the aftermath of the attacks have been more concrete. On April 30, a high-level Turkish military delegation, led by Lt. Gen. Yasar Kadioglu, Chief of Intelligence, Turkish General Staff, visited Air Headquarters in Islamabad. There, they held discussions with Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). Topics covered included the geostrategic landscape, ongoing joint ventures, and the future of military collaboration, especially in modern warfare technologies and training, as outlined by the PAF.

### **3. Deadly Blast Rocks Iran's Key Port, Killing Dozens, Halting Operations and Triggering Outrage** (*April 26 onwards, [Maritime Executive](#), [Iran Wire](#), [BBC](#)*)

A massive explosion rocked the Shahid Rajaei port in southern Iran's Bandar Abbas region, on April 26, 2025, resulting in the death of at least 75 people and injuring more than 1,000 others. The exact cause of the explosion remains officially unconfirmed, but Iranian authorities have suggested it was triggered by a fire in a storage area containing hazardous chemicals. The Customs Administration pointed to a stockpile of dangerous goods and chemical materials as the likely source, while the Interior Minister cited safety negligence and non-compliance with regulations as contributing factors. Some suggest the presence of missile-related materials at the port was behind the fire. Some reports suggest that the explosion involved sodium perchlorate, a chemical used in solid fuel for ballistic missiles. Further, media reports suggest that China had recently shipped such propellant to Iran. According to media reports published in late March, a shipping vessel, presumably Iran's MV Jairan, was reportedly carrying sodium perchlorate from China and was spotted at Bandar Abbas Anchorage. The explosion was powerful enough to be felt over a radius of several kilometers, shattering windows miles away and causing extensive damage to vehicles and buildings nearby. The port, a critical economic hub for Iran, is the country's largest and most advanced container terminal, handling the majority of its container traffic and a significant percentage of the total Iranian trade. Since the blast, more than half of the port's activities have been halted with Iran's Ministry of Health declaring a state of emergency in Bandar Abbar, citing serious risk of air pollution and chemical contamination. As a precautionary measure, schools, universities, and government offices in the city have also been shut down. Local authorities have also warned of possible food shortages in the short-term given parts of the port will likely be out of operation for some time. The tragedy has sparked public outrage over safety oversight and government transparency, with citizens demanding accountability for the negligence that allowed such a catastrophe to occur.

Several nations including India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey and Pakistan sent condolences over the tragedy.

#### 4. Israel Hamas war:

- **Latest Updates: Stakeholders divided on progress of Egypt ceasefire talks** (April 29 onwards, [Reuters](#), [i24NEWS](#), [Times of Israel](#))

Efforts to negotiate a new ceasefire between Israel and Hamas were revived in Cairo, with indirect talks involving delegations from both sides under the mediation of Egypt, Qatar, and the United States. Egyptian officials expressed optimism, claiming that the negotiations were close to achieving a “significant breakthrough” toward a long-term truce. However, this sentiment was quickly tempered by statements from both Israel and Hamas, which acknowledged limited progress but emphasized continued disagreement on several core issues — particularly the duration of the ceasefire and the future governance of Gaza.

The Egypt ceasefire proposal includes a six-month cessation of hostilities, releasing half the hostages held in Gaza, opening of the Rafah crossing, and allowing humanitarian aid access into Gaza. Israel reportedly demanded the complete disarmament of Hamas as a precondition to accepting a six-month truce proposal.

Hamas has apparently refused to accept any temporary ceasefire proposals and said no progress was made during the talks. On April 30, i24NEWS reported that Hamas had submitted a proposal to Egypt for a Gaza ceasefire that includes giving up its heavy weapons, such as rockets and long-range missiles. The group said they were also willing to halt tunnel digging, recruitment, and weapons development. Crucially, Hamas said it is prepared to place its missile stockpile under Egyptian supervision. However, it insisted on retaining what it calls “defensive weapons” — including sniper rifles, explosives, and short-range rockets — rejecting full disarmament. The group has asked Egypt to present the proposal to Israel.

- **PA Calls on Hamas to Disarm and Cede Control of Gaza to Palestinian Authority** (April 23, [Middle East Monitor](#))

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged Hamas to lay down its arms and hand over control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority (PA), as part of broader diplomatic efforts to shape a post-war future for the region.

“Hamas must hand over (its) Gaza responsibilities and hand over its arms to the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority and transform into a political party,” he said.

This marks his first such call since the war began in October 2023. Abbas’s remarks came at a leadership council meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) amid mounting pressure on Abbas—now 89—to name a successor.

The decision to maintain this military presence has raised concerns among international actors, who warn that it could further destabilize the region, potentially exacerbating tensions and prolonging the conflict.

- **PA’s Abbas names close confidant as likely successor** (April 27, [Reuters](#))

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has appointed Hussein al-Sheikh as his deputy and likely successor, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) said. A former political prisoner who spent over a decade in Israeli jails, al-Sheikh has served as the PA’s chief liaison with Israel and currently heads the PLO’s Executive Committee. The move, seen as critical



to addressing international concerns over Palestinian leadership, comes amid renewed calls for reform within the Palestinian Authority (PA). At 89, Abbas has led both the PLO and PA since 2004 but long resisted naming a successor or enacting internal reforms. The appointment comes as Western and Arab states push for a reformed PA to eventually govern post-war Gaza.

#### **5. Iran says open to E3 talks as France warns on sanctions** (April 24, [Radio Free Europe](#), [X/@araghchi](#) [Al Mayadeen](#))

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has urged a return to diplomatic engagement with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (E3) amid deteriorating relations between Tehran and the European trio. Acknowledging the current low point in relations, Araghchi posted a statement on X, emphasizing that assigning blame would be counterproductive. He described the status quo as a "lose-lose" situation, urging both sides to engage in constructive dialogue to break the impasse.

Reflecting on previous diplomatic efforts, Araghchi recalled a meeting in New York last September where he proposed a shift from confrontation to cooperation on various issues, including Iran's nuclear program. He reiterated that Iran had offered to work with the E3 across a broad range of mutual concerns, but said that the E3 chose to pursue a more adversarial approach instead. Araghchi, who recently visited Beijing and Moscow, offered to also visit Paris, Berlin and London in an effort to resume dialogue with the E3. "The ball is now in the E3's court," he said towards the end of his statement.

Days after Araghchi's comments, France issued a stern warning to Iran, signaling that it will not hesitate to reimpose United Nations sanctions if negotiations on Iran's nuclear program fail. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot made this declaration at a U.N. Security Council meeting on April 28, stressing that the expiration of the 2015 nuclear deal in October could trigger the "snapback" mechanism. This mechanism, which allows the E3—France, Britain, and Germany—to reinstate sanctions, could have devastating effects on Iran's already dwindling economy. The E3 countries are now targeting a decision on snapback by June, if no significant progress is made in negotiations. This development comes as the U.S. and Iran have been engaging with each other indirectly over the latter's nuclear program.

#### **6. Barak MRSAM Achieves Tri-Service Success in India,** (April 29, [Defence Industry Europe](#), [Times of Israel](#), [Naval Today](#))

The Barak Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) system, developed through a collaboration between Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), has achieved a significant milestone in advancing India's air defense capabilities. The system has successfully completed a series of operational trials across all three branches of the Indian military, with the latest success being a test conducted by the Indian Navy. This trial involved intercepting a fast-moving, low-altitude target over the sea. According to The Times of Israel, IAI's statement confirmed that the test included intercepting four aerial targets at varying speeds and challenging altitudes, all of which were destroyed by direct hits.

This successful trial builds upon previous achievements by the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force, which have been consistently validated through dozens of tests. In April, previous trials by the Indian Army also confirmed the system's effectiveness in targeting and destroying aerial threats across a range of altitudes and distances.

The Barak MRSAM, known as Barak 8 in Israel, features mobile launchers that can be deployed on both land and naval platforms. The missile system is designed to intercept targets up to 70 kilometers away, making it versatile for various defense scenarios. Since its procurement in 2017, it has already been integrated into the Indian Navy and Air Force, and the recent trials mark a critical step towards full tri-service deployment.

## 7. UAE's Desert Flag 2025 Kicks Off, ([April 20](#), [Arab News](#), [PIB](#), [Korea Times](#))

Desert Flag 2025 exercise held at Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE is a major multinational air combat exercise hosted by the Gulf nation annually. This year, the exercise is being held from April 21 to May 8 with participation from countries like the United States, India, Qatar, Bahrain, Turkey, France, Oman, South Korea, the UK, Australia, and Germany.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) participated with a potent mix of frontline aircraft, including MiG-29 and Jaguar IS ground attack aircraft, and IL-78 air-to-air refuellers. "The aim of the exercise is to undertake complex and diverse fighter engagements, with exchange of operational knowledge and best practices with some of the most capable air forces in the world," IAF spokesperson Wing Commander Jaideep Singh said.



The IAF at Al Dhafra, UAE for Desert Flag, 2025. (Credit: X/@IAF\_MCC)

Saudi Arabia has deployed six F-15C fighter jets with full crews, focusing on a range of complex training missions. These include defensive and offensive counter-air operations, close air support, combat search and rescue, as well as night flying and tactical night drop operations. The Saudi contingent's involvement is aimed at enhancing combat readiness, exchanging military expertise, and strengthening operational capabilities through realistic warfare simulations.

South Korea is also set to participate in Exercise Desert Flag marking its continued engagement since 2023. The Republic of Korea Air Force is dispatching a 30-member team along with a C-130H transport aircraft to take part in low-altitude infiltration, cargo drop, and tactical landing operations. Additionally, Korea's Akh Unit, stationed in the UAE, will join joint high-altitude parachuting drills, further deepening bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation.



**8. PM Modi Visits Saudi Arabia, Signs Key MoUs** (*April 22, 23, [Arab News](#), [PIB](#), [Argus Media](#)*)

The Indian Prime Minister's welcome to Saudi Arabia began in the sky with a rare and impactful gesture. As Air India One entered the Saudi airspace, it was flanked by the Royal Saudi Escort- a formation of a fleet of F-15 fighter jets- reserved for significant state visits. The ceremonial welcome continued with a 21-gun salute as Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in the Kingdom. He was received by Prince Saud bin Mishal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Governor of Makkah, H.E. Majid bin Abdullah Al Kassabi, Commerce Minister of and Saleh Ali Al-Turki, Mayor of Jeddah.

Modi was on a two-day visit to Jeddah, starting April 22, to bolster and deepen bilateral ties between the two countries. This marks his third visit to the Gulf nation, and the first visit to Jeddah by an Indian PM in four decades.

The visit, cut short due to the devastating terror attacks in Kashmir's Pahalgam that killed 26 tourists, witnessed the signing of some significant agreements and MoUs, reflecting the growing ties between the countries.

During the visit, PM Modi and the Crown Prince convened the second leaders' meeting of the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) — a key institutional mechanism, established in 2019, driving bilateral cooperation across a broad spectrum of sectors. Up until now, the SPC had two committees: a) the Committee on Political, Security, Social and Cultural Cooperation and their subcommittees and (b) the Committee on Economy and Investment and their Joint Working Groups. However, during the visit, the leaders announced the expansion of the scope of the council with the creation of two additional committees: Ministerial Committees on Defence Cooperation, and Tourism and Cultural Cooperation.

Defence was again touted as a key area of cooperation, as also reflected by the creation of the ministerial committee in the SPC. The leaders expressed their satisfaction with the growing defence cooperation between the two countries and noted several firsts like the Land Forces exercise SADA TANSEEQ, two rounds of the bilateral Naval Exercises AL MOHED AL HINDI, many high-level visits, and training exchanges. The two countries agreed to further deepen their defence ties and improve cooperation in defence manufacturing. The High-Level Task Force on Investment also advanced plans for Saudi Arabia's proposed \$100 billion investment in India, with key developments in refinery projects, taxation frameworks, and infrastructure collaboration. An agreement was reached to establish two oil refineries and petrochemical projects in India through a joint venture between the two countries. Media reports suggest that one of the two refineries might be BPCL's planned refinery in Andhra Pradesh which Saudi Aramco may join as an investor while the other will be a refinery in Gujarat with a partnership between ONGC and Aramco.

Key MoUs signed between the two countries included one between the Saudi Space Agency and India's Department of Space to collaborate on peaceful space activities, an MoU between the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia and India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to enhance cooperation in the health sector, an MoU between the Saudi Arabian Anti-Doping Committee (SAADC) and India's National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) focusing on education and prevention in sports doping and an agreement between Saudi Post and India Post to cooperate on inward surface parcel services.

## 9. Trump to visit Saudi, Qatar and UAE in May *(April 22, [Arab News](#))*

President Donald Trump is set to embark on a pivotal Middle East tour in mid-May visiting Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. This was supposed to be his first foreign visit since taking office, but now comes following his attendance at Pope Francis's funeral in Italy. White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt has announced dates for Trump's trip to the Middle East. "He will travel to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on May 13 until May 16," she said in a White House press briefing. Leavitt said the trip is intended to help "strengthen ties" with the Middle Eastern countries.

## IRAN

### • **Iran's Economic Crisis Deepens** *(April 26, [Iran News Update](#), [Radio Free Europe](#)- for past context)*

Iran is grappling with a worsening economic crisis marked by soaring inflation and a depreciating currency, leaving millions of workers struggling to afford basic necessities. In April 2025, food prices surged by 42.7% compared to the previous year, with staples like vegetables and legumes experiencing increases of up to 89.1% .

In response, the government had announced a 45% increase in worker's wage, setting it at approximately 104.4 million rials (\$110) per month . However, this adjustment has significantly fallen short of covering living expenses, as estimates suggest that the cost of living in Tehran has grown exponentially given the depreciating value of the rial.

The Iranian rial losing value, is a problem that has been exacerbated by the American sanctions, worsening the purchasing power crisis. Since January, the currency has depreciated by over 30% against major currencies, further inflating the cost of imported goods.

As economic pressures mount, public frustration is intensifying, with increasing criticism directed at the government's handling of the crisis. The economic strain has sparked protests, including strikes by merchants in Tehran's Grand Bazaar, highlighting the growing public frustration with the government's handling of the crisis.

### • **U.S. Target China, Iran-Based Firms in Fresh Round of Sanctions** *(April 29, [Reuters](#))*

The United States has imposed fresh sanctions on a network of companies and individuals in Iran and China accused of supporting Tehran's ballistic missile program- the latest action by the U.S. since Trump restored the "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran. The sanctions target six firms and six individuals allegedly involved in procuring key materials—such as sodium perchlorate and dioctyl sebacate—used in solid-fuel rocket motors for missiles developed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Five of the sanctioned firms are based in China, while one is based in Iran. Additionally, the six sanctioned individuals are all based in Iran. The U.S. Treasury Department said the network's activities directly contribute to Iran's missile capabilities, which Washington views as a threat to regional and international security.

"Iran's aggressive development of missiles and other weapons capabilities imperils the safety of the United States and our partners," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said.

"It also destabilises the Middle East, and violates the global agreements intended to prevent the proliferation of these technologies. To achieve peace through strength, Treasury will continue to take all available measures to deprive Iran's access to resources necessary to advance



its missile program.”

• **Iran’s Aragchi to Visit India in May: Media Report** (*April 29, ET Now*)

A report in ET Now suggests that Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Aragchi is expected to visit India in early May. This will mark Aragchi’s first visit to India in his current capacity as FM. During the visit, he is likely to discuss expanding cooperation on the Chabahar Port, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), and ways to deepen economic ties that remain constrained by sanctions, the media house said, quoting sources. The visit comes in light of the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the U.S. So far, the indirect talks being mediated by Oman seem to be on track. The visit also follows Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei’s recent call for stronger trade relations with key Asian economies like India, China, and Russia. Khamenei also confirmed that initial talks with the US in Oman went “well.”

• **Iranian President Concludes Key Visit to Baku, Marking Reset in Tehran-Baku Relations** (*April 28, Tehran Times, Special Eurasia*)

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian concluded a significant one-day visit to Baku marking a cautious reset in Tehran-Baku relations after years of friction. The trip, his first to the country as president, underscored a desire to strengthen bilateral cooperation and regional stability and witnessed the signing of key cooperation agreements. The two sides signed seven cooperation documents, covering areas such as transport, cultural exchange, health, media, political consultations, and investment. Both presidents hailed the agreements as “strategic,” vowing to implement them fully. During the visit, Pezeshkian reaffirmed Iran’s support for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, declaring the Karabakh region “an inseparable part of Azerbaijan,” signaling goodwill, but some divergences remain in their bilateral ties. These include Iran’s support for Armenia, opposition to the Zangezur corridor and Azerbaijan’s military cooperation with Israel.

In a joint press conference, Pezeshkian expressed hope that the visit would mark “the beginning of greater strides” in bilateral relations. Aliyev echoed the sentiment, calling Iran a strategic partner and noting that ties are rooted in long-standing friendship. Pezeshkian also participated in a joint business event and engaged with Azerbaijan’s Iranian diaspora, highlighting people-to-people ties.

• **Growing ties between Iran and Africa** (*April 29, Tehran Times*)

Iran hosted more than 700 traders, business leaders, and government officials from 38 African countries during the Third Iran-Africa Economic Cooperation Conference, held in Tehran and Isfahan. The high-level gathering was reportedly aimed to enhance Iran’s strategic outreach to the African continent and expand economic partnerships. Alongside the Iran-Africa summit, the delegates also participated in sector-specific engagements and bilateral meetings at the Iran Expo. The summit featured four specialized ministerial panels focused on petrochemicals, mineral and metal industries, agriculture and food industries, and health and medicine. At the time of the summit, Iran’s annual trade with Africa stood at approximately \$800 million—just 3% of its exports and 1% of its imports. Officials said Tehran aimed to raise this figure to

\$10 billion in the coming years through expanded trade, investment in infrastructure, and integrated value chains.

### • **Iran's Largest Mobile Operator Hacked, Data of 30 Million Users Compromised**

*(April 16, [Iran International](#), [Iran Focus](#))*

A hacker group named ShadowBits has claimed responsibility for breaching the customer database of Mobile Communications Company of Iran (commonly known as Hamrah Aval), Iran's largest mobile operator, compromising the personal data of 30 million subscribers.

In a statement on Telegram, the group said it had also accessed sensitive employee information. The leaked data reportedly includes names, dates and places of birth, national ID and birth certificate numbers, and full addresses. ShadowBits also claims to have obtained sensitive information about Hamrah Aval employees.

Iranian tech news website Digiato initially reported the breach but later removed the article. ShadowBits posted a screenshot of the report, alleging it was taken down under pressure from intelligence agencies. London-based cybersecurity researcher Nariman Gharib confirmed the breach's authenticity. He noted that MCI maintains close ties with Iran's intelligence services and that such telecom data is often leveraged for surveillance purposes. No official statement has been issued by Hamrah Aval or state media. The breach adds to a growing list of cyberattacks targeting Iran's telecom and financial sectors.

## IRAQ

### • **Baghdad prepares to host 34th Arab League Summit** *(April 17, [Shafaq News](#))*

Iraq is set to host the 34th Arab League Summit in Baghdad on May 17, marking its most significant regional diplomatic event in over a decade. Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein confirmed that preparations are underway, with officials anticipating the attendance of representatives from all 22 member states- including Syria.

Media reports suggest that Baghdad has been preparing for this event for months, finalising all logistical arrangements like accommodation, venue and diplomatic protocols. Reports also suggest that Iraqi envoys have visited several Arab nations to brief their leadership on the summit.

Analysts say this is a pivotal moment for Baghdad and an opportunity to refocus its narrative from internal conflict to diplomacy, with the potential to elevate Iraq's status as a mediator in Middle East affairs.

The summit comes amid heightened tensions across the region, including the ongoing war in Gaza and tensions in Lebanon, Syria, Libya and Sudan. The agenda for the summit will focus on Palestinian statehood, Syria's reintegration, and joint Arab strategies on water, energy, and reconstruction in Gaza.

### • **Two Drone Attacks Wound Five Peshmerga in Northern Iraq** *(April 29, [Institute Kurde De Paris](#), [Arab News](#))*

Two drone attacks in under 48 hours wounded five Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga (internal security forces of Kurdistan) in Duhok province of northern Iraq. The attacks, blamed on an unidentified "terrorist group," targeted newly established peshmerga posts in a disputed area frequent-



ly contested by Turkish forces and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). No group has claimed responsibility. The strikes come just weeks after the PKK declared a ceasefire in response to leader Abdullah Ocalan's unprecedented call to dissolve and disarm.

• **Political Uproar over Iraqi PM's Invite to Syria for the Arab League Summit** (April 28, [Turkiye Today](#), [PUK Media](#), [New Arab](#))

Iraq's Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities, Ahmed Fakak al-Badrani, formally delivered an invitation to transitional Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa on 28 April 2025, for the upcoming 34th Arab League Summit in Baghdad, scheduled for 17 May 2025. While Iraq aims to restore diplomatic ties with Syria and position itself as a mediator in regional issues, this move has sparked significant opposition from various Iraqi lawmakers and political factions, with some demanding that Sharaa be arrested if he enters the country. Reports indicate that over 50 Iraqi MPs have submitted a petition to the parliament speaker, urging a ban on the Syrian president's visit. Members of the Shiite political bloc expressed particularly strong criticism with some calling the invitation "a betrayal" of Iraqis who endured past waves of terrorism. Iran backed factions also voiced their discontent calling the invite "premature." Fanning the controversy further were documents being circulated on a Telegram channel by Iran backed groups alleging that al-Sharaa was in U.S. and Iraqi custody between 2005 to 2011.

• **Iraq PM's advisor visits Iran; eyes \$25 billion annual trade volume** (April 30, [Shafaq News](#), [Nour News](#))

Hazem Al-Khalidi, Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani's advisor, alongside the Deputy Minister of Trade and Head of the Federation of Industries of Iraq, met with Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, in Tehran. The delegation, visiting for the Seventh Iran Expo 2025, discussed bilateral issues and ongoing projects. Al-Khalidi provided updates on key initiatives, particularly in infrastructure and transportation, reaffirming Iraq's commitment to expanding cooperation.

The discussions centered on finalizing agreements for the Shalamcheh-Basra railway and the creation of joint free trade and industrial zones along the border. Rahmatollah Akrami, Iran's Acting Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, highlighted that the completion of the Basra-Shalamcheh railway would greatly enhance the ability of Iranian companies to partner with Iraqi counterparts. Once finished, the 36-kilometer railway is expected to link Basra with Iran's rail network, facilitating the movement of up to three million passengers annually and supporting the development of border markets and industrial zones. Additionally, it is projected to reduce transit costs by up to 20 percent, providing a significant boost to trade.

During the visit, al-Khalidi said annual trade between Iraq and Iran could level up from \$11 billion to \$25 billion. The increase hinges on finalizing agreements for border markets, joint economic zones, and shared industrial cities, he said.

- **Iraq opened the 13th Security, Defense, Military Industries and Cybersecurity Exhibition** (*April 19, [Shafaq News](#), [China.org](#), [Iraqi News](#), [Defense Talks](#), [Iraqi News Agency](#)*)

Iraq kicked off the 13th Security, Defense, Military Industries, and Cybersecurity Exhibition (IQDEX 2025) on April 19 at the Baghdad International Fairgrounds. The event witnessed participation from over 150 companies across 20 countries, including China, Russia, France, South Korea, and Pakistan. Inaugurated by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani, the four-day event aimed to boost Iraq's defense capabilities and international partnerships. The exhibition featured a range of technologies, from armored vehicles and drones to surveillance and cybersecurity systems.

Norinco, a Chinese state-owned defense corporation, showcased a range of advanced military systems tailored to meet the region's evolving defense needs. The company highlighted the VT-4 main battle tank, SH-15 155mm wheeled howitzer, Red Arrow 12EL ATGM, SR-5 multiple rocket launcher, and VN-22 6×6 infantry fighting vehicle. NORINCO officials also met with Iraqi and regional defense representatives to discuss potential cooperation in joint production, technology transfer, and military training.

Iran showcased a wide array of domestically produced weaponry designed for ground, naval, and aerial combat, as well as air defense and electronic warfare. Among the most notable exhibits was the "Shahed 136" suicide drone, which drew significant attention from visitors.

South Korea also made efforts to advance weapons sales to Iraq during IQDEX. The head of the South Korean Defence Ministry's central administrative agency, Defense Acquisition Program Administration, confirmed that negotiations took place on the sidelines of the event, focusing on potential deals involving fighter jets, mobile air defense systems, and the KUH-1 Surion utility helicopter.

Pakistani exhibitors also reportedly presented a range of military equipment, defense technologies, and cybersecurity solutions at the event. Heavy Industries Taxila, the country's top state owned manufacturer, presented its latest array of advanced military systems including the the Haider Main Battle Tank, the Al-Khalid Main Battle Tank, and the Advanced Infantry Mortar System (AIMS).

## TURKEY

- **Turkey and Italy Deepen Strategic Ties with 11 New Agreements, Boost Defense and Trade Cooperation** (*April 16, [Anadolu Ajansi](#), [Asharq Al-Awsat](#)*)

Turkey and Italy significantly enhanced their bilateral relations by signing 11 memorandums of understanding during the Fourth Turkey-Italy Intergovernmental Summit held in Rome. These agreements spanned various sectors, including trade, defense, industrial investments, space, culture, and transportation. A notable outcome of the summit was the collaboration between Türkiye's Baykar and Italy's Leonardo to produce unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), marking a significant step in defense industry cooperation. Additionally, both nations set a new annual trade volume target of \$40 billion, up from the previous \$30 billion, reflecting their commitment to deepening economic ties. The summit also addressed regional issues, with discussions on managing migration flows and potential collaboration on Syria's redevelopment. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni acknowledged Türkiye's role in reducing migration numbers,



while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasized continued cooperation in combating irregular migration. Agreements were also reached between the Turkish and Italian space agencies to cooperate on peaceful space activities, and between their culture ministries to combat the illicit trade in cultural property. Other cultural accords included inter-museum partnerships and initiatives to preserve archaeological heritage, as well as cooperation between the Turkish State Archives and the Italian Archives Directorate.

- **Turkey to join Three Seas Initiative as strategic partner** (*April 30, [Hurriyet Daily](#)*)

Turkey is set to join the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) as a strategic partner, marking a significant step in its efforts to deepen regional cooperation across Central and Eastern Europe. The announcement was made by Polish President Andrzej Duda during the opening of the 10th Three Seas Initiative Summit in Warsaw. In the same address, Duda confirmed that Montenegro and Albania will become associated participating states, while Türkiye and Spain will join as strategic partners. Turkey inclusion is seen as pivotal amid ongoing geopolitical tensions and the war in Ukraine. Its participation is expected to strengthen regional stability, particularly in the Black Sea region, and reinforce economic ties across the 3SI corridor.

- **Pak PM Travels to Turkey to Bolster Ties** (*April 22, [Dawn](#), [Minute Mirror](#), [Türkiye Today](#)*)

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Turkey on April 22 for a two-day official visit, aiming to strengthen bilateral ties between the two nations. Accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, and Special Assistant on Foreign Affairs Syed Tariq Fatemi, the delegation's visit underscores Pakistan's focus on enhancing cooperation with Turkey. During the visit, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to a united front against terrorism and emphasized joint efforts to eliminate threats posed by groups such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). The two also called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Erdoğan praised Pakistan's vocal stance on the Palestinian issue, acknowledging it as one of the few countries actively condemning the situation in Gaza. The visit is Sharif's first bilateral tour to Turkey.

## SAUDI ARABIA

- **Trump Administration Prepared \$100 Billion+ Arms Package for Saudi Arabia Ahead of May Visit** (*April 16, [Reuters](#)*)

The U.S. government may offer Saudi Arabia a \$100 billion arms package, Reuters reported, quoting six sources with direct knowledge of the subject. The news outlet said the proposal is being prepared so President Trump can announce it during his upcoming visit to the kingdom. Defense contractors expected to be tapped for the proposed sale included Lockheed Martin, which could supply C-130 transport aircraft, radars, and missiles, as well as RTX Corp (formerly Raytheon), Boeing Co, Northrop Grumman, and General Atomics, four of the sources told Reuters. Executives from several companies were also reportedly considering travel to the region as part of the U.S. delegation. It is also reported that discussions on a potential deal for Lockheed's F-35 jets, a long coveted deal by the Saudis, is also on the agenda for discussion. The officials downplayed the possibility of an actual deal being signed though. It is not currently known how many of these would be new deals, given several deals have been in the works with Saudi Arabia. Trump is scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE from May 13 to May 16.

- **Saudi Arabia at BRICS in Brazil** (*April 30, [Saudi Gazette](#), [Arab News](#)*)

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Eng. Waleed Al-Khereiji represented Saudi Arabia at the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. During the meeting, Al-Khereiji emphasized Saudi Arabia's role as a reliable and neutral partner committed to de-escalating global tensions. He underscored the Kingdom's dedication to fostering peace, stability, and economic development through constructive dialogue and multilateral cooperation. Al-Khereiji highlighted Saudi Arabia's efforts in promoting regional stability and its active participation in international initiatives aimed at conflict resolution. He reiterated the Kingdom's support for collaborative approaches to address global challenges, including economic disparities and geopolitical conflicts.

Saudi Arabia is currently not a member of BRICS. In 2023, the kingdom was invited to join but it is yet to do so.

- **French Foreign Minister in Riyadh; Discuss Upcoming UN Peace Conference on Israel-Palestine** (*April 25, [Aawasat](#), [Arab News](#)*)

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot recently visited Riyadh, where he met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan to discuss preparations for an upcoming international conference aimed at advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Scheduled for June at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the conference will be co-hosted by France and Saudi Arabia and is expected to focus on promoting a two-state solution to the conflict.

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- **Saudi Defense Minister's Landmark Tehran Visit Signals Deepening Strategic Dialogue** (*April 25, [Tehran Times](#), [People's Dispatch](#), [Amwaj Media](#), X/ [@kbsalsaud](#)*)

Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, visited Tehran in a landmark trip that underscored the ongoing efforts to strengthen ties between the two regional powers following their 2023 reconciliation. Received with full military honors by Iran's Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, the visit marks the second high-level defense exchange since the 2023 restoration of diplomatic ties.

During his visit, Prince Khalid met with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian. During the meeting with the Ayatollah, Bin-Salman is said to have delivered a letter from his father, King Salman bin Abdulaziz. Amwaj media, quoting sources, said the letter had four key areas addressed by Riyadh. These include Palestine, Yemen, bilateral security, and Iran's ongoing backchannel with the Trump administration. Reportedly, he Saudi monarch expressed support for Iran's negotiations with Washington, calling them essential for regional stability

Talks focused on expanding defense cooperation, regional stability, and counterterrorism. Iran emphasized indigenous security mechanisms free from foreign interference, while Saudi Arabia reportedly communicated its intention to avoid renewed military escalation in Yemen—seeking Tehran's help in conveying this message to Ansarollah leaders.

The visit came amid rising regional tensions, with Tehran cautioning against a potential Saudi-Israeli alignment and expressing concern over reports of a possible visit by Donald Trump to Riyadh. Iranian officials have urged Riyadh to adopt a moderate stance in the face of potential confrontational proposal, reports suggest. ehran has called on Saudi Arabia to convey to Washington the importance of prioritizing dialogue and regional stability over short-term political calculations.

## LEBANON

- **Lebanese President Embarks on Official Visit to UAE** (*April 30, [National News Agency](#)*)

Lebanese President Gen Joseph Aoun commenced a two-day official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on April 30, 2025. The visit aims to strengthen bilateral ties between Lebanon and the UAE. During the visit, President Aoun is expected to discuss various matters, including enhancing diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and regional developments. This visit underscores Lebanon's commitment to fostering stronger ties with the UAE and other Gulf nations.

- **Lebanon Heads for Municipal Election, Barometer Test for Hezbollah** (*April 22, [LBC International](#), [Arab News](#), [New Arab](#)*)

Lebanon is set to hold its first municipal elections in nearly a decade on May 4, 2025, marking a significant step toward political renewal after years of postponements due to various crises. The elections will commence in the Mount Lebanon governorate, including Beirut's southern suburbs, and will proceed over four weekends throughout May. The elections are seen as a barometer of Hezbollah's popular support, especially in its strongholds in the southern suburbs of Beirut. While Hezbollah and its ally, the Amal Movement, are expected to dominate the

local vote, there are indications of shifting political allegiances. The war with Israel and its aftermath have influenced public sentiment, with voters expressing concerns over reconstruction and governance, as per media reports. In preparation for the elections, the Interior Ministry has set up support centers to assist voters and election officials, and the Higher Defense Council has emphasized the importance of logistical and security readiness.

- **Lebanon Gets \$250 Million World Bank Loan to Help with Electricity Crisis** (*April 25, [Arab Weekly](#), [New Arab](#)*)

Lebanon has secured a \$250 million loan from the World Bank to address its chronic electricity shortages, which have been exacerbated by the 2019 economic collapse and the subsequent 14-month conflict with Israel and Hezbollah. The loan aims to support critical reforms in the electricity sector, including improvements in electricity bill collections and the development of solar energy projects, which are expected to reduce costs by \$40 million annually. The agreement was formalized in Washington by Lebanese Finance Minister Yassine Jaber and World Bank official Jean-Christophe Carret. Minister Jaber emphasized that the loan will provide strong momentum for Lebanon's reform efforts in rehabilitating the electricity sector.

- **Israeli Airstrikes Hit Beirut Suburbs; Lebanon's Leaders Warn of Escalation, Urge U.S. and France to Intervene** (*April 27, [Press TV](#), [Naharnet](#), [BBC](#)*)

On April 27, 2025, Israeli fighter jets conducted an airstrike on Beirut's southern suburb called Dahieh, marking the third such strike on the suburb since the U.S.-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect in November 2024. The Israeli military stated that the target was a Hezbollah facility storing precision-guided missiles, asserting that such storage violates the ceasefire terms. In response, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun condemned the attack and called on the United States and France, as guarantors of the ceasefire, to compel Israel to halt its violations. He warned that continued Israeli actions undermine Lebanon's stability and pose significant risks to regional security. Hezbollah's deputy leader, Sheikh Naim Kassem, stated that the group has adhered to the ceasefire but warned of potential escalation if Israeli attacks persist and if the Lebanese government fails to respond adequately.

- **Israel Conducts Over 50 Strikes in Lebanon Amid Rising Tension** (*April 28, [Barrons](#), [Naharnet](#)*)

In April 2025, the Israeli military reported executing more than 50 airstrikes across Lebanon, targeting what it identified as Hezbollah military sites. These operations, including the third strike on Beirut's southern suburbs since the November 2024 ceasefire, have heightened concerns over the stability of the region.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has warned that continued Israeli military actions threaten the country's stability and called for Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The ongoing hostilities have resulted in significant casualties, with Lebanese officials reporting at least 190 deaths and 485 injuries since the ceasefire's implementation.

- **Jamaa Islamiya commander killed in Israeli strike near Damour** (*April 22, [Naharnet](#)*)

On April 22, 2025, an Israeli drone strike near the coastal town of Damour, approximately 20



kilometers south of Beirut, killed Hussein Izzat Atwi, a senior commander of Jamaa Islamiya's armed wing, Al-Fajr Forces. Atwi, also a university professor, was traveling to his workplace in Beirut when his vehicle was targeted in the Baawarta area. The Lebanese Civil Defense confirmed the strike, and forensic teams recovered his body from the wreckage. Jamaa Islamiya, a Sunni Islamist political party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, described Atwi as an "academic leader and university professor." The Israeli military labeled him a "significant terrorist" involved in cross-border plots and coordination with Hamas.

- **Lebanon Summons Iranian Ambassador Over Hezbollah Disarmament Remarks**

*(April 24, [The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center](#))*

On April 24, 2025, Lebanese Foreign Minister Yousef Raji summoned Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, urging respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and warning against public statements that may be seen as interference in internal affairs. The move followed Amani's April 18 post rejecting the notion of Hezbollah's disarmament, calling it a "conspiracy." Attempting to dial back tensions ahead of the meeting, Amani had clarified on April 23 that Iran viewed Hezbollah's status as an internal Lebanese matter and urged national dialogue.

- **Lebanon army takes control of Jamaa Islamiya posts in Arqoub** *(April 25, [L'orient, Today New Arab](#))*

On April 24, 2025, the Lebanese Army conducted a significant operation in the Arqoub region of southern Lebanon, seizing military posts, weapons, and rockets reportedly linked to Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya's armed wing, the Al-Fajr Forces. Footage aired by Al-Jadeed TV depicted soldiers confiscating rocket launchers and munitions from a site believed to be under the group's control. In response, Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, a Sunni Islamist party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, issued a statement denying any military presence in Arqoub. The group asserted, "We do not have military bases in Arqoub and have no connection to the weapons seized in the region," distancing itself from the confiscated arms.

## SYRIA

- **Sectarian Clashes Erupt Near Damascus** *(April 28, [Al Manar TV](#))*

Clashes erupted in Syria's Jaramana suburb near Damascus on April 28, 2025, following the circulation of a controversial audio clip allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad. The recording, falsely attributed to Druze cleric Sheikh Marwan Kiwan, incited sectarian violence between Druze residents and Sunni militants from neighboring towns, resulting in at least 13 deaths, including two security personnel. The unrest quickly spread to nearby Druze-majority areas, including Sahnaya and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, where attacks on security checkpoints led to additional fatalities. In response, Israel conducted airstrikes targeting extremist groups it claimed were preparing attacks on Druze communities, emphasizing its commitment to protecting the Druze minority.

- **Al-Sharaa rejects Kurdish call for decentralised state** (*April 27, [Arab News](#)*)

On April 27, 2025, the Syrian presidency firmly rejected Kurdish-led proposals for a decentralized federal system, labeling them as a threat to national unity. The statement emphasized that any attempt to establish separate entities under the guise of federalism, without national consensus, is unacceptable. It also condemned recent activities and declarations by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) advocating for federalism. This response followed a conference in Qamishli, where Syrian Kurdish parties, including the SDF, adopted a joint vision for a decentralized democratic state.

- **Abbas Makes First Syria Visit in 16 Years, Meets Interim President** (*April 28, [Al Mayadeen](#)*)

On April 18, 2025, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas made a landmark visit to Damascus, marking his first trip to Syria in 16 years and his first since the ousting of President Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. Abbas met with Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa to discuss revitalizing Palestinian-Syrian relations and addressing shared regional challenges. The leaders focused on strengthening bilateral ties and tackling common threats, including the status of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Notably, Abbas's travel plans faced obstacles when Israeli authorities denied airspace clearance for a helicopter intended to transport him from Ramallah to Jordan, delaying his arrival in Damascus .

## AROUND WEST ASIA

- **Houthi militants claim responsibility for attacks on Israeli cities** (*April 23, [Daiji World](#)*)

On April 23, 2025, Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for missile and drone attacks on Israeli cities, including Haifa and Tel Aviv. These strikes marked the first-ever attack by the group on Haifa and reportedly set off sirens in northwestern Israel. The Houthis stated that these operations were in solidarity with Palestinians amid the ongoing Gaza conflict.

- **U.S. hits more than 1000 targets in Yemen since Mid-March** (*April 30, [Arab News](#)*)

Since March 15, 2025, the United States has intensified its military operations in Yemen, reportedly conducting over 1,000 airstrikes against Houthi positions. These strikes, part of Operation Rough Rider, aim to dismantle Houthi missile and drone capabilities and secure maritime routes in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) reports significant casualties among Houthi fighters and leaders, alongside the degradation of their military infrastructure .



- **Azerbaijan Signs Key Deal with Saudi Arabia** (*April 29, [Trend News Agency](#), [Arab News PK](#)*)  
On April 29, 2025, Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia signed a series of strategic agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation across various sectors, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), food safety, pharmaceuticals, and shipping. The agreements were formalized during the 8th session of the Saudi-Azerbaijani Joint Commission in Riyadh, co-chaired by Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Samir Sharifov and Saudi Arabia's Minister of Investment Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al-Falih. Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia signed key agreements aimed at strengthening bilateral ties across various sectors. An MoU was established between Saudi Arabia's Monsha'at and Azerbaijan's KOBIA to foster SME development through entrepreneurship, innovation, and technical cooperation. Additionally, an agreement between the Azerbaijan Food Safety Agency and Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Agriculture was signed to enhance food security and plant protection. The two nations also formed a partnership between Azerbaijan's Parla Pharmaceuticals and Saudi Arabia's National Development Group, alongside a shipping agreement between Azerbaijan's ADO-G and Saudi Arabia's SMI/BLUE MASAR.

- **Russia to Hold Arab league Summit This Year:** (*April 22, [Arab News](#)*)  
Russian President Vladimir Putin announced plans to host a summit with the Arab League later this year, aiming to strengthen ties amid ongoing Western sanctions following Russia's military actions in Ukraine. The announcement was made during a meeting with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman, marking the first-ever visit by an Omani head of state to Russia. Putin emphasized that many Arab nations support the initiative and extended an invitation to Sultan Haitham to attend the summit. The summit is expected to focus on enhancing political, economic, and security cooperation between Russia and Arab League member states.

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