

MEIWeekly.



One of the new ships delivered to the Iranian Navy in the port city of Bandar Abbas, Iran in November 2019. Photo: Rahbar Emamdadi / Mehrs News Agency.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING INSTITUTE EVENTS

Security and Maritime Conflicts in the South China Sea

As the rivalry between China and the United States develops, South-east Asia has become a key theatre for both parties to make strategic overtures in. Mr Bilahari Kausikan, Dr Collin Koh and Dr Abdullah Baabood discuss how such dynamics will unfold in the South China Sea, the Persian Gulf and beyond.



Join us for this public talk, which will be conducted online via Zoom. All are welcome to participate, so check out <https://nus.edu/2L.tqjN7> for more details now!

WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

19 Killed during Iranian Naval Exercise

In the second missile accident of the year, a missile from an Iranian Navy frigate was fired at another Iranian naval vessel during a military exercise in the Gulf of Oman on Sunday (10 May), killing at least 19 sailors and wounding 15, reported *The New York Times*. The incident is still under investigation, with the navy stating that the Konarak, the missile boat, “had an incident and a number of the navy’s seamen were martyred”. Widespread mourning took place in Iran over social media, with criticism levelled at the military’s lack of transparency and professionalism rising once again as Iranians recalled the downing of the Ukrainian airliner in January.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrives in Jerusalem, Israel on Wednesday, 13 May, to meet with Israeli leaders. Photo: Ron Przysucha / US Department of State / shared on Flickr.

Pompeo Visits Israel over West Bank Plans

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo paid an eight-hour visit to Israel on Wednesday (13 May) to meet with Prime Ministers Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz in order to caution Israel’s leadership against pushing forward with plans to annex the West Bank, experts say. This prudence is somewhat surprising given President Trump’s Middle East peace plan, which was seen by many to be a tacit approval of the annexation, but growing pressure from leaders of neighbouring Arab states appears to have prompted a new hesitance on the part of the United States.

Saudi Arabia Raises VAT from 1 July

As part of a slew of measures to address the economic impact of Covid-19, Saudi Arabia will be suspending the cost of living allowance as of 1 June and raising the value added tax (VAT) from 5 per cent to 15 per cent as of 1 July, reported *Saudi Press Agency* on Monday (11 May). According to Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan, the twin measures are aimed at shoring up state finances, which have been strained by low oil prices and the pandemic. He warned that “strict and painful measures” were necessary to reduce expenditure, as the country struggles to protect its economy.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Emirates Airline to Resume Flights

From next Thursday (21 May) onwards, UAE carrier Emirates will resume scheduled flights for eligible passengers to nine cities, including London, Chicago and Melbourne. Precautions will be taken on flights to reduce the amount of person-to-person contact, according to the airline. As countries begin to phase out restrictions, the airline looks to resume operations to additional destinations.



Lebanon to End Four-Day Lockdown

The Lebanese government announced a four-day long lockdown which began on Wednesday evening (13 May) and will end at dawn next Monday (18 May), reversing the government’s attempts to phase out restrictions which had been imposed since mid-March. This comes as a spike of reported infections occurred last week, prompting the government to once again order residents to stay home and for all non-essential businesses to close. As the country continues to suffer under an economic and financial crisis, the government has asked the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance.

#MUSTREAD: WHAT’S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK: Mr Gilad Erdan is set to be only the second Israeli to both lead Israel’s mission to the United Nations and be the country’s ambassador to Washington, a role he pledges to “harness everything [he] can from morning until night to cope with”.
<https://nyti.ms/35VduEU>



Corruption, flawed policies and the sudden pandemic has caused the Lebanese pound to crash, resulting in inflation and the threat of starvation for millions. Besides demands a significant change in lifestyles, the economic crisis could pauperise the middle class, long been known for continuing to enjoy life’s little luxuries even in the face of political instability or civil unrest.
<https://nyti.ms/35Zp5CT>

TWITTER: On Tuesday (12 May), Mr Sagi Karni, Israel’s ambassador to Singapore, delivered 600 care packages to staff at Singapore General Hospital, National Centre for Infectious Diseases and the National University Hospital to show support for frontline healthcare workers.
<https://bit.ly/2T14JUK>

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