

# MEI Weekly.



Israel's Yamina party leader, Naftali Bennett (L), smiles as he speaks to Yesh Atid party leader, Yair Lapid (R) during a special session of the Knesset, Israel's parliament in Jerusalem on 2 June 2021. Photo: Ronen Zvulun / AFP.

## WHAT'S HOT: MEI PUBLICATIONS, PODCASTS AND MORE

**WATCH & LISTEN:** ICYMI – Singapore's Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, Ms Grace Fu highlighted three ways Singapore and the Middle East can co-operate on climate change in last week's MEI panel for the Doha Forum. Catch the full panel discussion, which featured Asian experts, [here](#).

**CALL FOR PAPERS:** MEI is initiating a Call For Papers for a new series focusing on Israel-GCC relations in its journal Insights. This series is aimed at taking stock of the Abraham Accords one year since their signing, mainly with a view to understand the shifts that have taken place in relations between Israel and the GCC states. Submissions should be between 2,000 and 3,000 words and are due by 30 June 2021. For more information, click [here](#).

## WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

### Netanyahu's Rivals Form Coalition to Oust Him

Israeli opposition parties on Wednesday, 2 June, reached a coalition agreement to form a government and oust Mr Benjamin Netanyahu, the longest-serving prime minister in Israeli history. The new coalition is an unusual and awkward alliance between eight political parties – a diverse array of ideologies from the left to the far right. The alliance would be led until 2023 by Mr Naftali Bennett of the Yamina party. Though Mr Bennett's party won just seven of the 120 seats in parliament, the anti-Netanyahu forces could not form a government without his support, allowing him to set the terms of his involvement in the coalition.

### Iran's Largest Warship Catches Fire and Sinks

The largest warship in the Iranian navy caught fire and sank on 2 June, in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances. The blaze began at the wee hours of Wednesday and firefighters tried to contain it but their efforts failed to save the 207-metre Kharg which was used to resupply other ships in the fleet at sea and conduct training exercises. Meanwhile, on the same night, a massive fire broke out at the oil refinery serving Iran's capital, sending thick plumes of black smoke over Tehran. It was not immediately clear what caused the blaze at the refinery or if there were injuries although hot summer weather in Iran has caused fires in the past.



A picture taken on Wednesday, 2 June, shows smoke billowing from the site of a refinery fire in the Iranian capital Tehran after a liquefied gas line leaked and exploded. Photo: Atta Kenare / AFP.

### No End in Sight to Egypt-Ethiopia Nile Dam Crisis

Ethiopia has angered Egypt, a downstream country that relies on the Nile River for its water needs, by insisting that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will operate in July and August regardless of whether a deal on the dam's operation is reached. Frustrated by a decade of fruitless negotiations with Ethiopia, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi said Egypt preferred a diplomatic settlement of its dispute with Addis Ababa but his nation was not prepared to be bogged down in indefinite talks.

## CALENDAR: UPCOMING MEI EVENTS

### China: Full Steam Ahead in the Gulf?

China's expanding relations with Arab nations has steadily come to encompass a wide range of spheres and activities ranging from its support for Saudi initiatives in sustainable development to its decision to make the UAE its regional base for vaccine production. Is China's footprint in the Persian Gulf expanding beyond economics and moving into health and green initiatives adding to its array of soft power tools in the region and beyond?



This public talk, held in collaboration with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), will address this and more. The event will be conducted online via Zoom on **Tuesday, 8 June 2021, from 4.00pm to 5.30pm (SGT)**. All are welcome to participate. Click [here](#) for more details and to register.

### Beyond the Chokepoints: New Geopolitics of Arabian Seaports

Vital chokepoints such as the Straits of Hormuz, through which around one-sixth of the global oil supply flows, represents a key feature of the geopolitical terrain in the Middle East. However, new developments are emerging with states such as Oman, Pakistan, and Iran building thoroughly modern ports that circumvent the strait to open into the Arabian Sea, providing an advantage over the current leading ports in the region. What are the broader implications of this possible shift in the landscape of chokepoint politics?

This public talk will be conducted online via Zoom on **Wednesday, 9 June 2021, from 3.00pm to 4.30pm (SGT)**. All are welcome to participate. Click [here](#) for more details and to register.

### MEI's Bridging the Gulf Series: Session 7

Qatar, a young state with a commensurately small population has emerged as an influential powerbroker in the Middle East. Despite the challenge arising from the Gulf crisis from 2017 to 2021, Qatar has proven resilient and hastened processes of economic diversification. What are the tools that have enabled it to project power, soft or otherwise, on the international stage? How can we better understand Qatar's "maverick" diplomacy that has enhanced its branding?

To know all these and more, join us on **Friday, 11 June 2021, from 4.00pm to 5.00pm (SGT)**. All are welcome to participate. Click [here](#) for more details and to register.

## LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

### EU Official Sees Iran Nuclear Deal at Next Round of Talks

The European Union (EU) envoy coordinating talks on reviving the Iran nuclear deal said on Wednesday that he believed a deal would be struck at the following round of talks next week but other senior diplomats said "the most difficult decisions lie ahead." Two diplomats said the talks, which began in April and are in their fifth round, were expected to resume on Thursday, 10 June though that was not set in stone. Such a schedule would leave only eight days to reach a pact before Iran's presidential election on 18 June.



### Sheikh Jarrah Eviction Case Nears Decision

Israel's top court ordered Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit to submit a legal opinion on the eviction case before the court against Palestinian residents living in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, moving toward a ruling in the high-profile case that sparked a wave of protests and has drawn international attention. The State Prosecutor's Office asked the Supreme Court to delay its decision on the request to appeal until Mendelblit decides his position on the case so that he can intervene in it. Justice Isaac Amit granted the request by the State Prosecutor's Office and gave Mendelblit until 8 June to submit his legal opinion.

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