

Headlines:

- **US Considering Sanctions on India**
- **European War Causes Economic Problems in Middle East**
- **Libya's New Government**
- **Saudi Arabia Celebrates First 'Founders Day'**

Details:

US Considering Sanctions on India

The US is considering whether to apply or waive sanctions on India, one of America's key partners, under the CAATSA law for its purchase of the S-400 missile defence system from Russia, a senior administration official has told lawmakers. The US administration is required under a tough domestic law, Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), to impose sanctions on any country that has significant transactions with Iran, North Korea or Russia. Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia said that the Biden administration is yet to decide on applying sanctions on India under CAATSA. *"India is a really important security partner of ours now. And that we value moving forward that partnership and I hope that part of what happens with the extreme criticism that Russia has faced is that India will find it's now time to further distances,"* Mr Lu said. Mr Lu's remarks came as India faced flak from US lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats for choosing to abstain from a UN vote on Wednesday the 2nd of March to rebuke Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A total of 141 nations voted in favour of the move condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and five nations were against it, with 35 countries, including India, abstaining. In October 2018, India had signed a \$5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the then Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions.

European War Causes Economic Problems in Middle East

As two of the world's key wheat producers face off in an all-out war, the future looks uncertain for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries that need wheat from Ukraine and Russia. Russia is the world's number-one wheat exporter and Ukraine, the largest producer after China and India, is among the top five wheat exporters worldwide. Rising prices and insufficient supply have already affected economically-depressed countries in the Middle East and North Africa that buy the bulk of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine, bringing them to the brink of crisis. *"The wheat harvest starts in July and this year's yield is expected to be a healthy one, meaning abundant supply for global markets in normal conditions. But a protracted war in Ukraine can affect the harvest in that country, and therefore global supplies,"* Karabekir Akkoyunlu, a lecturer in politics of the Middle East at SOAS, University of London, told Al Jazeera. Turkey relies on Russia and Ukraine for 85% of its Wheat supplies and a drawn war will make the year difficult for the average Turkish feeling already burdened due to soaring inflation levels. Egypt relies on Russia and Ukraine for 85% of its wheat imports, Tunisia relies on Ukraine for between 50% – 60% of its wheat imports. Tunisia is already feeling immense pressure and a lot of people in Tunisia talk about the potential for a Lebanon scenario. Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon, in addition to Yemen and

Sudan are at great risk from a surge in prices and a spike in demand. Given bread's role as a politically-charged commodity in this part of the world, further strain on wheat supply and escalating prices could even spark revolt.

Libya's New Government

Libya's House of Representatives, which is based in the eastern town of Tobruk, approved a new government on the 1st of March with former Libyan interior minister Fathi Bashagha as its prime minister. The Incumbent Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh, who heads the rival UN-recognised Government of National Unity (GNU) based in the western city of Tripoli, rejected the parliament's decision, vowing to remain in power and rule from Tripoli. On the 1st of March Bashagha said his new government plans to assume power peacefully in Tripoli, setting up a potential clash with Dbeibeh in the country's capital. For most of the last eight years, Libya has had two rival governments, with one operating in the country's east and the other in the west. Dbeibeh's government was formed in March 2021 to unify the two governments and shepherd the country toward a planned December 2021 presidential election, but the election was scrapped at the last minute over infighting about how it should be held and who was eligible to run. Bashagha's new government was sworn in on the 3rd of March and includes 35 different cabinet positions. Allies of the powerful commander Khalifa Hifter and his Libyan Arab Armed Forces were appointed to several cabinet positions as Bashagha tries to build a broad coalition of support. The struggle in Libya is between the US who backs the government in Tobruk, but who have failed to impose their control over the whole of Libya and Britain who has for long backed the government in Tripoli. Britain has managed to scupper the elections that were due in December and this has meant America's political architecture has failed to evolve in Libya.

Saudi Arabia Celebrates First 'Founders Day'

Saudi Arabia held celebrations recently to commemorate for the first time its foundation nearly 300 years ago, choosing a date that downplays the central role played by Islam and the clerics from the ultra-conservative Wahhabi school of Islam. King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud declared a public holiday to commemorate the day of the Kingdom's foundation nearly 300 years ago. The monarchy lined up several events, including musical performances on Saudi's modern history, fireworks, drone shows and special effects, with 3,500 performers taking part, local media reported. The anniversary marks the day in 1727 when Mohammed bin Saud, founder of the first Saudi state, took over the emirate of Diriyah, a remote town which now lies on the northwest edge of the Saudi capital Riyadh, about 18 years before what historians generally consider as the beginning of the Saudi state when bin Saud, a tribal leader, forged an alliance with preacher Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, whose doctrine today is often referred to as 'Wahhabi' Islam. Saudi Arabia's Shura Council, an influential advisory body to the government, also approved last month a proposal to amend the law regulating the national flag and anthem. The Saud monarchy has now officially abandoned its Islamic and cultural heritage through its reforms in order to shore up the future of the monarchy.