

Syria's Assad receives Saudi invitation to Arab summit



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (r) receives an invitation to next week's Arab summit from Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Jordan, Nayef bin Bandar al-Sudairi.
● AFP

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad received an invitation to next week's Arab summit in Saudi Arabia, the presidency said Wednesday, the first such invitation since the country's war began. The body had suspended Damascus in November 2011 over its crackdown on protests, which began earlier that year and spiralled into a war that has

killed more than 500,000 people, displaced millions and battered the country's infrastructure and industry, AFP reported. On Sunday, the Arab League welcomed back Syria's government, securing Syria's return to the Arab fold after years of isolation. Assad received an invitation from Saudi King Salman "to participate in the

thirty-second Arab League summit, which will be held in Jeddah on May 19", the Syrian presidency said in a statement. Assad said the summit "will enhance joint Arab action to achieve the aspirations of the Arab peoples," the statement added. The last Arab League summit Assad attended was in 2010 in Libya.

The invitation came a day after Riyadh and Damascus announced that work would resume at their respective diplomatic missions in Syria and Saudi Arabia, after more than a decade of severed relations. The kingdom cut ties with Assad's government in 2012 and Riyadh had long openly championed Assad's ouster, backing

opposing militants in earlier stages of the war. But a flurry of diplomatic activity has been underway since a deadly earthquake struck Syria and Turkey on February 6.

A decision in March by Saudi Arabia and Iran, a close ally of Damascus, to resume ties also shifted the political landscape. Regional capitals have gradually been warming to Assad as he has stubbornly held onto power and clawed back lost territory with crucial support from Iran and Russia. In 2018, the UAE re-established ties with Syria and has been leading the recent charge to reintegrate Damascus into the Arab fold.

Turkey, which supported early militant efforts to topple the Syrian government and maintains a military presence in Syria's north, has also shown interest in mending ties with Damascus.

Analysts say Western sanctions on Syria are likely to continue to deter investment.

The United States and Britain said Tuesday they still opposed relations with Assad, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken telling reporters in Washington "we are not going to be in the business of normalising relations with Assad".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Battles shake Sudan's capital as power struggle escalates



REUTERS - Fighting in Sudan's capital escalated on Wednesday with fierce clashes and air strikes, witnesses said, as delegations of rival military factions continued talks in Saudi Arabia aimed at securing a ceasefire and humanitarian relief. Residents reported ground battles in several neighbourhoods of Khartoum between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), as well as heavy gunfire in the north of Omdurman and the east of Bahri, two adjacent cities separated from Khartoum by the River Nile.

AFP Journalist killed in Ukraine



AP - French international news agency Agence France-Presse said its Ukraine video coordinator was killed Tuesday during a rocket attack near the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut. Arman Soldin, 32, was with a team of AFP journalists traveling with Ukrainian soldiers when the group came under fire with Grad rockets, the agency said. The rest of the AFP team was uninjured.

Daesh claims deadly bomb attack in Damascus

AFP - The Daesh terrorist group claimed responsibility for a bomb attack Wednesday on police station in the Syrian capital that left one policeman dead and wounded four others. Daesh members "managed to plant and detonate an explosive device on a vehicle inside a police station" in Damascus, the group said in a statement on its Telegram channels.

Pakistan court indicts ex-PM after arrest sparks deadly unrest

A Pakistani court on Wednesday indicted former prime minister Imran Khan on charges of selling state gifts during his four years in power, a day after his arrest in an unrelated fraud case sparked unrest that killed at least five people. The action against ex-cricket star Khan, 70, came at a precarious time for the South Asian country of 220 million people as it grapples with a severe economic crisis and a delay to an International Monetary Fund bailout since November, Reuters reported.

At least four people died in clashes in the northwestern city of Peshawar on Wednesday, a hospital official said, as Khan's supporters clashed with police across the country in response to his arrest by the anti-graft agency

in a separate case related to land fraud. Another person died on Tuesday. Khan's indictment followed a decision by the Election Commission of Pakistan in October, which found him guilty of illegally selling state gifts between 2018 and 2022 and barred him from holding public office until the next election due in November. He has denied any wrongdoing. Khan's colleagues in his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party did not immediately respond to a request for comment on his indictment. His legal team has challenged his arrest in the Supreme Court. Mobile data services were shut for a second day on Wednesday as street protests continued, with federal ministers accusing Khan's supporters of torching several buildings

and vehicles. Police said they had arrested more than a thousand protesters for violence in Khan's home province of Punjab. Khan, a cricket hero-turned-politician, was ousted as prime minister in April 2022 in a parliamentary no-confidence vote. He has not slowed his campaign against the ouster even though he was wounded in a November attack on his convoy as he led a protest march to Islamabad calling for snap general elections. The corruption cases are two of more than 100 registered against Khan after he left office. In most of the cases, Khan faces being barred from holding public office if convicted. He is now being held in a police guesthouse in the capital Islamabad. Broadcaster Geo News reported



that he had been remanded in the custody of the anti-corruption agency for eight days. Khan was arrested a day after the powerful military rebuked him for repeatedly accusing a senior military officer of trying to engineer his assassination and the former armed forces chief of being behind his removal

from power last year. The military has denied Khan's allegations. The armed forces remain Pakistan's most powerful institution, having ruled it directly for close to half its 75-year history through three coups. Despite its major influence it recently said it was no longer interfering in politics.

Supporters of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan throw stones towards police during a protest against Khan's arrest, in Peshawar, Pakistan, on May 10, 2023.
● FAYAZ AZIZ/REUTERS

Conditions ripe for Turkey-Syria reconciliation

These conditions will have positive economic, political, and cultural impacts on all countries in the region and will speed up the progress and development of the region.

The available evidence indicates that one can be optimistic about the Moscow quadrilateral meet-

ing to resolve the Ankara-Damascus disputes. Both countries need to resolve their differences, resume relations, and cooperate to fight against the re-emergence of terrorist movements in the region.

It seems that the grounds for the reconciliation of Ankara and Damascus are prepared. Of course,

Syria has reasonable conditions for normalizing its relations with Turkey. So, Ankara decides the success of the negotiations. In the midst of these recent developments in the region, we are once again witnessing the positive and outstanding role that the Islamic Republic of Iran has played. Once again, Tehran

has announced its readiness to solve regional and even trans-regional problems such as the war between Ukraine and Russia. That is because Tehran has always sought regional stability. By now, Iran's honesty must have been revealed to everyone, especially the countries of the region.