

# Syria's Assad discusses peace talks, trade with Russian envoys

Sat, 2019-04-20 18:54

BEIRUT/MOSCOW: Syrian President Bashar Assad met senior officials from his strongest ally Russia in Damascus on Friday and Saturday to discuss upcoming peace talks and trade between the two countries, state media in Syria reported.

Russia has helped Assad's forces to take back most of the country but the eight-year-long war continues. Swathes of the northeast and northwest are out of his control, while sanctions and a fuel shortage are constricting the economy.

Moscow has pushed for a political process involving talks on a new constitution and elections as a way to end the conflict, but Assad has played down the possibility that the Turkey-backed opposition or foreign countries might participate.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said late on Friday that Assad had met Moscow's Syria envoy Alexander Lavrentiev, Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin and several Russian Defense Ministry officials.

However, while it said they had discussed the formation of a constitutional committee, which Syria's opposition last year agreed to join under UN auspices after a Russian-hosted peace conference, Syrian state media did not mention it.

Syria's official SANA news agency said meetings had focused on the next round of talks in Kazakhstan involving Syria, its allies Russia and Iran, and the rebels' backer Turkey.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in Syria's war and about half the pre-conflict population of 22 million has been displaced.

Russia launched a military intervention to support Assad in 2015, turning the tide of the fighting in his favor.

On Saturday, SANA said Assad had met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov to discuss trade and economic cooperation, "particularly in the fields of energy, industry and increasing trade."

It said Assad and Borisov discussed mechanisms to overcome obstacles including those "resulting from the sanctions which countries against the Syrian people imposed on Syria."

The United States and European Union imposed tough sanctions on Syria early in the conflict over what they described as atrocities carried out by the government, which it denies.

This week, Syrian state media reported that a fuel shortage which has resulted in rationing and long queues at petrol stations came in the context of difficulty in importing fuel and the halting of a credit line from Iran. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Mouallem said in a statement on Saturday carried by SANA that "Syria is always coordinating with Iran."



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## [Heavy clashes break out in southern suburbs of Libyan capital](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Sat, 2019-04-20 14:11

TRIPOLI: Heavy clashes broke out in the southern districts of the Libyan capital Tripoli on Saturday, with the shelling audible from the centre of the city, residents said.

Eastern Libyan forces launched an offensive on Tripoli more than two weeks ago, but they have been stopped in the southern outskirts by forces allied to the UN-backed administration based in the city.

The head of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Khalifa Haftar says his forces are fighting to clear the country of “terrorist” elements.

The shelling was louder and more frequent on Saturday than in previous days, residents said. Both sides claimed progress in southern Tripoli, but no more details were immediately available.



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## [Sudan attorney general orders formation of committee to oversee corruption probe](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2019-04-20 10:48

CAIRO: Sudan’s attorney general on Saturday ordered the formation of a committee to oversee investigations into crimes involving public funds, corruption and criminal cases related to recent events, the state news agency SUNA said, citing a statement from the attorney general.

SUNA also said that attorney general Al-Walid Sayed Ahmed had submitted a request to the director of the country’s National Intelligence and Security Services to lift the immunity of a number of officers suspected of killing a teacher who died in custody in February.

Earlier on Saturday, a judicial source said that Sudan’s public prosecutor has begun investigating ousted President Omar Al-Bashir on charges of money laundering and possession of large sums of foreign currency without legal grounds.

The source said that military intelligence had searched Bashir’s home and found suitcases loaded with more than \$351,000 and six million euros, as well as five million Sudanese pounds.

“The chief public prosecutor... ordered the (former) president detained and quickly questioned in preparation to put him on trial,” a judicial source told Reuters.

"The public prosecution will question the former president in Kobar prison," the source added.

Relatives could not be immediately reached on Saturday for comment about the investigation.

Bashir, who is also being sought by the International Criminal Court over allegations of genocide in the country's western Darfur region, was ousted on April 11 by the military following months of protests against his rule and had been held at a presidential residence.

Bashir's family said this week that the former president had been moved to the high-security Kobar prison in Khartoum.

As president Bashir often played up his humble beginnings as the child of a poor farming family in Hosh Bannaga, a small village consisting mainly of mud houses on the eastern bank of the Nile some 150 km (93 miles) north of Khartoum.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association, leading the protests, has called for holding Bashir and members of his administration to account, a purge of corruption and cronyism and easing an economic crisis that worsened during Bashir's last years in power.

On Wednesday, Sudan's transitional military council ordered the central bank to review financial transfers since April 1 and to seize "suspect" funds, according to state news agency SUNA.

The council also ordered the "suspension of the transfer of ownership of any shares until further notice and for any large or suspect transfers of shares or companies to be reported" to authorities.

Meanwhile, protest leaders are to hold talks Saturday with Sudan's military rulers who have so far resisted calls to transfer power to a civilian administration, a head figure in the protests told AFP.

"The military council will hold talks with the Alliance for Freedom and Change at 8:00 p.m. (1800 GMT) today," said Siddiq Yousef, a senior member of the umbrella group leading the protest movement.



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Sudan protest leaders to unveil civilian ruling body  
Sudan's military rulers arrest ousted president's brothers

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## [Iraq hosts Saudi Arabia and Iran at parliamentary conference](#)

Sat, 2019-04-20 13:33

BAGHDAD: Iraq is hosting senior parliamentary officials from Saudi Arabia and Iran on Saturday as Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi seeks to bolster his country's nascent role as a mediator in the region.

Delegations including the heads of parliament from Turkey, Kuwait, Syria and Jordan are also attending the one-day conference in the Iraqi capital to discuss regional security, diplomacy and economic issues.

The speaker of Iraq's parliament Mohammed Al-Halbousi, who is chairing the

gathering in Baghdad, said that his country's relations with neighboring states are strong and that Iraq intends to develop them.

Visiting officials pledged support for reconstruction and development efforts in Iraq and for the country's continued stability following its victory over Daesh, after three years of war, Al-Halbousi said in a statement.

Al-Halbousi also stated that Iraq continues to fight terror with regional and international assistance, and thanked all countries that have supported this fight.

Abdul Mahdi recently returned from visits to Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is unusual for Saudi and Iranian officials to attend the same events.

The premier has said Iraq will maintain strong ties with Iran, but also with the United States and regional neighbours, many of which, like Saudi Arabia, consider Tehran a foe.

Abdul Mahdi met King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during his visit to Riyadh, his first official trip to the kingdom since taking office six months ago.

Iraq and Saudi Arabia have been at loggerheads since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, but they have recently undertaken a diplomatic push to improve ties.

Abdul Mahdi's visit to Riyadh came 10 days after he visited Iran. During his trip to Tehran, he met President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Many of Iraq's leaders, from its Shi'ite majority, have close ties with Iran, the main Shi'ite power in the Middle East.



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Saudi Arabia keen to promote ties with Iraq Crown prince, Iraqi PM hold talks in Riyadh

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## [Separate militant attacks kill nearly 50 Syrian soldiers](#)

Author:

AFP

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1555740557490914400

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BEIRUT: Syrian government forces came under separate attacks from Daesh militants and Al-Qaeda-linked insurgents in different parts of the country that killed nearly 50 soldiers and allied fighters, activists and a war monitoring group said Saturday.

In one attack, Daesh militants ambushed Syrian government forces in the

desert of central Homs province Thursday night, setting off two days of clashes that killed 27 soldiers, including four officers, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A pro-government militia, known as Liwa al-Quds, confirmed the ambush, saying it had sent its fighters to liberate the two besieged battalions, made up of nearly 500 soldiers, east of the town of Al-Sukhna.

In a Facebook post, the militia said it successfully broke the siege and liberated the surviving soldiers before pulling the bodies of those killed and damaged vehicles to safety.

Liwa Al-Quds, one of the elite militias operating side by side with government troops, didn't give a casualty figure. It said the besieged battalions were out in desert looking for an army division that disappeared in the area over the last few days.

Daesh lost its last territories in Syria in March after months of battles with US-backed Kurdish-led fighters in the eastern province of Deir El-Zour. But the militants remain active in the desert to the west of Deir El-Zour, where they have taken refuge and increasingly targeted government troops and allied militia.

The militant group, which once controlled large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq, has kept a network of sleeper cells active in both countries. It has also kept up its media operations. The Daesh-affiliated Amaq news agency reported the attack east of Al-Sukhna, saying that in 24 hours of clashes its militants killed nearly two dozen Syrian soldiers and officers. It said the militants also seized Syrian government ammunition and vehicles.

Separately, government forces came under an attack from insurgents of Al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahir Al-Sham in northwest Syria, where a cease-fire is supposed to be in place.

The Observatory said the insurgents assaulted the government positions west of Aleppo early Saturday, killing 21 soldiers and allied fighters. Baladi news, an activist-operated news site, said the attack in Akrab village killed 27 soldiers, quoting an HTS operative. Akrab overlooks the Aleppo-Damascus highway.

A cease-fire was reached in the area in September but is increasingly tested. The area includes the last major stronghold of the armed opposition. The cease-fire was negotiated by Russia and Turkey, who support opposite sides of the conflict but who have closely coordinated their policies.





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