

## [Exhausted Iraqis evacuated from Sudan back in Baghdad](#)

BAGHDAD: More than 200 exhausted Iraqis evacuated from Sudan flew back to Baghdad on Thursday, with one saying he hadn't seen the sun in 10 days because of the fighting.

Among the 234 people who were flown to Baghdad International Airport from Port Sudan were 16 Syrians, the foreign ministry said.

It was unclear whether they would stay in Iraq or return home.

"Overnight the war happened," said 30-year-old Iraqi engineer Ahmed Al-Baldawi, his eyes red with fatigue.

"There was no food, no water and no electricity. For 10 days we didn't see the sun."

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## [Ailing Erdogan re-emerges by video link with Putin](#)

ISTANBUL: Turkiye's ailing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday re-emerged from a two-day absence and spoke by video link with Vladimir Putin at a virtual ceremony unveiling a Russian-built nuclear power plant.

The 69-year-old leader suspended all campaigning for Turkiye's pivotal May 14 election after getting sick while conducting a live TV interview on Tuesday evening.

Erdogan said he had developed an upset stomach while hopping between five cities for rallies and public project launches at the start of the week.

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## [Palestinians criticize European Commission president over 'racist trope' in video message to Israel](#)

LONDON: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has been criticized by Palestinians for using an "anti-Palestinian, racist trope" in her praise for Israeli democracy during her comments to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of Israel.

In a video posted on Twitter by the EU embassy in the country, von der Leyen, who visited Israel and Palestine last year, paid tribute to Israel as "a

vibrant democracy in the heart of the Middle East.”

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## **Iran says Belgium prisoner swap ‘finalized’, Brussels denies**

TEHRAN: Iran said Wednesday a prisoner exchange with Belgium was “finalized,” hinting at the release of Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele which Brussels swiftly rejected as “manipulation.”

Vandecasteele, 42, was sentenced in January to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes for “espionage,” Tehran’s judiciary said at the time, after a trial his family and Belgian authorities dubbed “unfair.”

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## **As Assad returns to Arab fold, Syrians watch with hope, fear**

BEIRUT: Syrians living on opposite sides of the largely frozen battle lines dividing their country are watching the accelerating normalization of ties between the government of Bashar Assad and Syria’s neighbors through starkly different lenses.

In government-held Syria, residents struggling with ballooning inflation, fuel and electricity shortages hope the rapprochement will bring more trade and investment and ease a crippling economic crisis.