

## Syria hails US lifting of Assad-era sanctions

AFP, Damascus

Syria yesterday hailed the Trump administration's lifting of US sanctions, as Washington looks to open a new chapter in its relations with Damascus.

US President Donald Trump surprised many with his announcement of the new policy on a Gulf tour earlier this month, during which he shook hands with Syria's jihadist-turned-interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Trump said he wanted to give the war-torn country's new rulers "a chance at greatness" after their overthrow of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December.

"The Syrian Arab Republic welcomes the decision from the American government to lift the sanctions imposed on Syria and its people for long years," a foreign ministry statement said.

It described the move as "a positive step in the right direction to reduce humanitarian and economic struggles in the country".

US sanctions were first imposed on Syria in 1979 under the rule of Bashar al-Assad's father Hafez. They were sharply expanded after the bloody repression of anti-government protests in 2011, which triggered the country's civil war.

Washington imposed sweeping sanctions on financial transactions with Syria and made clear it would use sanctions to punish anyone involved in reconstruction as long as Assad remained in power.

Since Assad's ouster, the new administration has been looking to build relations with the West and roll back sanctions, but some governments had expressed reluctance, pointing to the Islamist past of leading figures.

Sharaa himself was once considered a "terrorist" by Washington, with a \$10 million bounty on his head.

On Friday, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said his country was "implementing authorisations to encourage new investment into Syria".

The sanctions relief extends to Syria's new government with conditions that the country not provide safe haven for terrorist organisations and ensure security for religious and ethnic minorities, the US Treasury Department said.

Concurrently, the US State Department issued a 180-day waiver for the Caesar Act to make sure sanctions do not obstruct foreign investment into Syria.

The 2020 legislation severely sanctioned any entity or company cooperating with the ousted government.



People stands with a woman outside her home, which was hit by a flood, in Glenthorne, Australia, yesterday. Tens of thousands of Australians remained isolated and thousands were without power yesterday, authorities said as conditions in New South Wales eased after days of heavy rain that caused widespread flooding.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Russia strikes Kyiv with drones, missiles

Hundreds more POWs exchanged in second day of prisoners' swap

AFP, Kyiv

A massive Russian drone and missile attack on Kyiv yesterday wounded at least 15 people, even as Russia and Ukraine continued the biggest prisoner swap since the start of Moscow's invasion.

Ukraine's air force said Russia



launched 14 ballistic missiles and 250 attack drones overnight, adding that it had downed six missiles and 245 drones.

Kyiv was "the main target of the enemy attack", the air force said in a statement.

"With each such attack, the world becomes more certain that the cause of prolonging the war lies in Moscow," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on X.

"Only additional sanctions targeting key sectors of the Russian economy will force Moscow to cease fire," he said.

Kyiv city officials reported fires and fallen debris in several parts of the Ukrainian capital, after AFP journalists heard explosions overnight.

Officials said 15 people were injured in Kyiv itself and five civilians were killed by Russian strikes in the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions.

before the second stage on Saturday. Russia's defence ministry said each side exchanged 307 prisoners of war yesterday via Belarus, a Kremlin ally.

It said the Russian POWs would receive psychological and medical help in Belarus before travelling on to Russia.

Both sides received 390 people in the first stage on Friday and are expected to exchange 1,000 each in total.

"We expect the exchange to continue tomorrow," Zelensky said.

Russia has signalled it will send Ukraine its terms for a peace settlement after the swap, which is set to continue over the weekend -- without saying what those terms would be.

The two enemies have held regular prisoner swaps since Russia launched its 2022 offensive -- but none have been on this scale.

## Indian troops shoot dead Pakistani man

AFP, Ahmedabad

Indian border troops shot dead a Pakistani man who they said had crossed the international frontier and did not stop when challenged, the force said yesterday.

The shooting comes two weeks after arch-rivals India and Pakistan agreed a ceasefire after a four-day conflict, which killed 70 people.

India's Border Security Force (BSF) said its troops Friday evening had spotted "one suspicious person advancing towards the border fence", which lies beyond the international frontier in Gujarat state's Banaskantha district.

"They challenged the intruder, but he continued to advance, prompting them to open fire", the BSF said in a statement. "The intruder was neutralised on the spot".

He doubled down later in the day,

## Trump fires new 50% tariff threat at EU

Targets smartphones

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump rekindled his trade war with the European Union on Friday by threatening 50 percent tariffs, as Brussels reacted with a call for "respect."

Trump also unleashed a broadside against smartphone makers including US tech giant Apple, threatening them with new duties of 25 percent if they do not move production to the United States.

Stock markets fell as the Republican's comments fueled fears of global economic disruption, after a relative lull in recent days after Trump reached deals with China and Britain.

Trump first raised the issue of EU tariffs in an early morning post on his Truth Social network.

"Our discussions with them are going nowhere!" Trump said. "Therefore, I am recommending a straight 50 percent Tariff on the European Union, starting on June 1, 2025."

He doubled down later in the day,



telling reporters in the Oval Office that there was nothing the 28-nation bloc could do to change his mind.

"I'm not looking for a deal. I mean, we've set the deal. It's at 50 percent," Trump said. "They haven't treated our country properly. They banded together to take advantage of us."

Billionaire property tycoon Trump, 78, also denied that his tariffs would hurt American businesses.

"They're not hurting, they're helping," he said.

Trump's new tariffs would, if imposed, dramatically raise Washington's current baseline levy of 10 percent, and fuel simmering tensions between the world's biggest economy

and its largest trading bloc.

The EU's trade chief said the bloc would work for a trade deal with Washington based on "respect" not "threats."

"The EU's fully engaged, committed to securing a deal that works for both," trade commissioner Maros Sefcovic posted on X, after a previously planned call with US Trade Representative Jamie Grier and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

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