

Tensions ease as Sisi meets King Salman



Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (R) receiving Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, upon the latter's arrival in the capital Riyadh.

Riyadh

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi received a royal welcome from King Salman as he landed yesterday in Saudi Arabia for a visit to boost ties after months of tension.

Salman, surrounded by key Saudi officials, greeted Sisi as he stepped off the plane in the capital Riyadh and hosted him for lunch, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

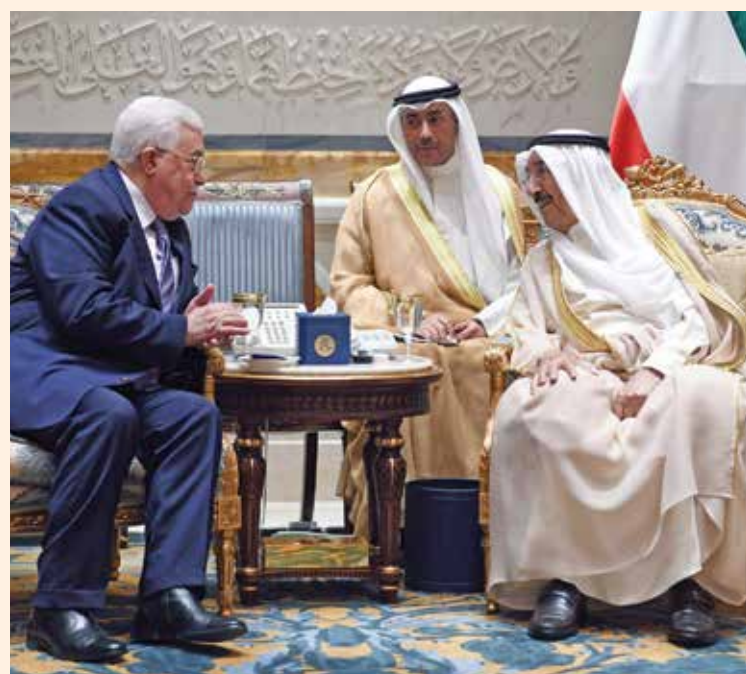
The Egyptian presidency announced the visit in a statement on Friday, saying Sisi's trip was in response to an invitation by Salman and aimed at "bolstering strategic relations between the two countries".

It said Salman and Sisi would discuss "regional and international issues of common interest".

"The struggle against terrorism which threatens security and stability" in the region and beyond would top their agenda, it said.

Sisi met Salman on the sidelines of an Arab League summit in Jordan last month to break the ice after months of apparent tensions between the two allies.

That encounter on March 29 came days after Egypt announced that Saudi energy giant Aramco had resumed delivering shipments of petroleum products after abruptly suspending them in October.



A handout picture provided by the Palestinian Authority's press office (PPO) shows Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas (L) meeting with the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, in Kuwait City.

Qataris speak of joy at release

Doha

Two Qatari hunters who endured a 16-month hostage ordeal in Iraq spoke Sunday of their joy at being released, in the first public comments since the group were freed.

Mohammed Marzouki was among 24 Qataris and two Saudis who were on a hunting trip in a mainly Shia area of southern Iraq when they were kidnapped in late 2015.

They flew back to Doha on Friday following their release under a complex regional deal linked to the Syrian civil war. "When I saw the lights

of Doha, I felt like life was beginning again -- my happiness is indescribable," Marzouki told the local Arabic daily newspaper, Al-Sharq.

"My joy at returning to the homeland is a feeling that cannot be described in words."

A fellow hostage, Khalid bin Dhafer Al-Dosari, told the same newspaper that "all our aches and pains disappeared once we reached our homeland".

The hunting party, believed to include prominent members of the Qatari royal family, were captured in mid-

December 2015 and held captive until they were freed on Friday.

There was never any claim of responsibility for the kidnapping of the hunters, who were widely believed to have been taken by militias with close ties to Tehran.

While the terms of the group's release have not been made public, it has been reported that Qatar paid millions in ransom to secure their freedom.

After flying home on Friday, the hunters were met at Doha's Hamad International Airport by the country's emir,

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. The release deal was linked to the evacuation of thousands of people from the Syrian government-held towns of Fuaa and Kafraya, long besieged by rebels.

The evacuations marked the end of the first stage of a deal brokered by rebel backer Qatar and regime ally Iran.

Wealthy citizens of Sunni Gulf states venture to countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq to hunt with falcons without the bag limits and conservation measures they face at home. (AFP)

Petrol price hikes: Kuwait Court backs government

Kuwait City

Kuwait's appeals court ruled yesterday that a government decision to raise petrol prices was in line with the constitution, overturning a decision by a lower court.

It said the decision to raise prices was within the cabinet's powers.

Ali al-Ali, one of several lawyers who filed the suit against the government, said on Twitter the group intends to challenge the latest ruling in Kuwait's supreme court, whose decisions are final.

Kuwait has been hit hard by a sharp drop in crude prices since June 2014.

The OPEC member recorded a budget shortfall of \$15 billion in the fiscal year to March 2016.

It was the first deficit since the fiscal year to March 1999.

In response, the government adopted austerity measures including hikes in the prices of electricity, water and fuel.

In September, it raised the cost of fuel by up to 80 per cent depending on its grade, the first such increase since 1998.

The action was met with stiff opposition by lawmakers, who this month filed motions to question the prime minister in parliament over the price hike and other issues.

Israeli attack on Syria military camp kills 3

Damascus

An Israeli attack on a Syrian training camp near the Golan Heights killed three members of a pro-government militia yesterday, an official from the forces said.

The Al-Fawwar camp in Syria's southwestern Quneitra province is used by the National Defence Forces (NDF), which command some 90,000 fighters across Syria.

The NDF official said that two fighters were also wounded in the Israeli attack, but said it was unclear whether the damage was inflicted by an air strike or shelling.

Another Syrian source inside the training camp said that around 6:00 am local time (0300 GMT), "security guards at the camp saw what looked like three fireballs coming towards the camp."

"Then there were several consecutive blasts because of the explosion of ammunition warehouses" that firefighters worked hard to extinguish, the source said.

The source also said that they were "Israeli rockets" but could not specify what kind of missiles may have been used.