

Assad Stresses Look East Policy

# Indian Minister Visits Syria for First Time in 7 Years

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – India's Minister of State for External Affairs Vellamvelly Muraleedharan has paid an official visit to Syria, a first by an Indian minister in several years, in an apparent sign of New Delhi engaging with the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Muraleedharan arrived in the Syrian capital, Damascus, for a two-day visit. It came on the heels of Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad's visit in 2022 to New Delhi, where he held talks with Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

Muraleedharan's trip is the first by a high-profile Indian diplomat in seven years and comes after Syria's return to the Arab League more than a decade after its membership was suspended by the 22-member regional organization. Arab government representatives in Cairo voted on May 7 to return Syria to the League after a 12-year suspension.

All 13 of the 22 member states that attended the session endorsed the decision. However, there is still no Arab consensus on normalization of ties with Damascus. Several governments did not attend the



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (center right) meets with Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Vellamvelly Muraleedharan in Damascus, Syria, July 13, 2023.

meeting. Among the most notable absentees was Qatar, which continues to back the so-called moderate opposition groups against the Assad government.

On Thursday, Muraleedharan met with Assad, where the Syrian leader expressed his country's interest to expand ties with New Delhi.

Assad highlighted that Syria has adopted an eastward foreign policy approach, emphasizing that the shift is due to friendly economic and political relations between Damascus and Asian countries, including

India, and Asians' commitment to values and principles.

The president described relations between Syria and India as deeply-rooted, praising India's stance vis-à-vis developments in the Arab world and its unwavering support for Syria demonstrated earlier this year, when a devastating earthquake struck the northwestern part of the country.

Assad also underlined the need for establishment of close relations among Asian states in order to play an effective role in the new multi-

polar world order, stressing that the West, as part of attempts to exercise its hegemony, is provoking conflicts worldwide.

Muraleedharan, for his part, extended friendly greetings of Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Syrian president. He said relations between New Delhi and Damascus are constantly developing despite all challenges.

Separately, Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous met with Muraleedharan, where the two sides discussed promotion of economic relations.

Syrian Foreign Minister Mekdad also received the visiting Indian minister.

Mekdad hailed India's outright rejection of all forms of terrorism, and its unwavering support for Syrian people through all harsh conditions they have gone through.

The top Syrian diplomat said Damascus expects a principal role for New Delhi in the multi-polar world order, as India respects the sovereignty of other states and refrains from interfering in their domestic affairs.

## President... (Continued From Page One)

The first objective of the trip was to boost Iran's "strategic depth", he added.

Raisi said African nations are attracted to Iran's Islamic Revolution because of the Iranian nation's faith, anti-colonialism spirit, and courage.

African countries, he said, are gifted with abundant natural resources and minerals, and enjoy many potentials and areas for closer cooperation.

"Greater work needs to be done to expand relations with African states in political, economic and cultural fields more than ever," he added.

"We share common views with these countries in opposition to unilateralism, defending human rights, protecting family values and fighting against moral corruption and organized crime," the Iranian president said.

Raisi described Kenya as the gateway to East Africa, stressing that closer ties with Nairobi will strengthen interactions in other spheres.

"We believe that the world is not limited to the West," Raisi said, stressing that Iran's foreign policy is based on engaging with the whole world. "Africa is as important as America and Asia."

It's been quite a busy year for Iranian President Raisi in terms of diplomatic engagement. In February he made an official state visit to China, where 20 agreements were signed, in addition to receiving pledges from President Xi Jinping to strengthen security and economic cooperation – more on that later. Beijing was also the venue where Raisi's administration agreed to resume diplomatic relations with regional rival Saudi Arabia the following month.

In May, Raisi visited close regional ally Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and signed long-term cooperation agreements.

Following his Damascus visit, Raisi travelled to Indonesia, with the aim of enhancing "political, economic, commercial, cultural, and civilizational relations" with Southeast Asia's largest economy.

Last month, the Iranian president embarked on a three-nation Latin America tour, visiting Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. These countries, like Iran, face sanctions imposed by the U.S.

Iran continues to strive to extend its outreach and influence worldwide, including in what is considered "America's backyard". In Caracas, Raisi hailed the new world order favoring independent states, noting that "imperialism is falling."

In Africa, the Iranian president signed 21 cooperation documents, covering various fields.

Raisi's Africa tour signifies Iran's renewed focus on fostering stronger political and economic ties with African nations and enhancing cooperation within the Global South. Unlike his predecessor, President Raisi is skeptical of the West and favors pragmatism to preserve the national interest.

Under Raisi, the 25-year strategic agreement with China was put into motion and recently, Iran became a fully-fledged member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

By reaching out to Asia, Latin America and Africa, Iran aims to foster solidarity and forge stronger alliances with countries that share "common political views" and challenges. Through this Africa tour, President Raisi aims to advance the idea of a more equitable and multipolar world order, which he spoke of in Venezuela. Furthermore, Iran's accession to the SCO strengthens its commitment to expanding connections beyond Western countries and fostering closer relationships with nations in Eurasia.

This regional alliance, comprising major Eurasian powers China and Russia, presents a powerful platform for Iran to extend its political influence and strengthen economic ties with key partners. It opens avenues for greater economic cooperation, joint security initiatives and enhanced diplomatic engagement, all of which contribute to Tehran's efforts to counter Western isolation attempts.

The whirlwind of diplomacy in recent months suggests that Iran is far from isolated, contrary to the West's aspirations.

Earlier this month, Raisi received a formal invitation from South African President Matamela Ramaphosa to attend the upcoming BRICS+ summit in Johannesburg next month. This development is notable as both Saudi Arabia and Iran are keen to join the group.

The remaining months will be interesting as to where Raisi will head next, but with Global South cooperation high on the foreign policy agenda, it is probable that he will prioritize visiting a country that seeks to bypass Western sanctions or favors de-dollarization, in alignment with Tehran's advocacy for a multipolar world order.

## Nasrallah... (Continued From Page One)

would not remain silent on the issue. "The village is part of Lebanon's soil and should return to Lebanon without any condition."

Commenting on the recent desecration of a copy of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden, the

Hezbollah chief said the act of sacrilege was committed with the goal of "sowing division between Muslims and Christians."

The perpetrator of the heinous act of profanity "is in liaison with Mossad and sought to create division between" the people of the two faiths, Nasrallah stated.

The Christian clergy, however, stepped in and condemned the sacrilege, thus contributing much towards the prevention of sedition, he noted.

The Hezbollah chief, meanwhile, called on the people of the region to demand their respective governments to adopt more decisive stances on the issue of the desecration of the Muslim holy book.

## Envoy... (Continued From Page 2)

protection of freedom of expression and behavior within the framework of law.

"All governance mechanisms of the civilized world seek punishment for terrorists as allowing terrorists to act freely translates into destruction of law and freedom of law-abiding people."

The ministry official touched on the Iranian nation's hatred of the MKO, saying any move by anyone in anywhere in support of terrorism is condemned.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran urges the Italian government to demonstrate its seriousness in preventing the country from turning into a safe haven for terrorists.

"Support for terrorism will not guarantee the interests of Italy in benefiting from constructive ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and will instead severely tarnish the country's image in the eyes of the public opinion."

Rajavi was reportedly invited by the Italian parliament to participate in a hearing session of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The MKO has carried out numerous terrorist attacks against Iranian civilians and government officials since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

On June 20, Albanian police forces entered the MKO camp, known as Ashraf-3, near Tirana due to its engagement in "terror and cyberattacks" against foreign institutions. Authorities seized 150 computer devices linked to terrorist activities. At least one person was killed and dozens of others were injured during the clashes at the camp.

Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama later said the MKO must leave the country if it wants to use Albanian soil to fight against Iran, adding that his country has no intention of being at war with Iran and "does not accept anyone who has abused our hospitality."

The European Union, Canada, the United States and Japan had previously listed the MKO as a "terrorist organization."

In 2012, the group was taken off the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. The EU followed suit, removing the group from its list of terrorist organizations.

## IRGC... (Continued From Page 2)

engine, an emergency station, and a bank, among other places in the city but their attempts to continue rioting failed following the timely presence of security forces.

In a statement, Jaish ul-Adl claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sistan and Baluchestan province, which borders Pakistan and Afghanistan, has been the scene of several terrorist attacks against civilians and security forces in recent years.

Iran's security forces have been vigilant and successful in protecting the border areas and thwarting most terrorist plots by foreign-backed anti-revolution elements across the country.

## Lavrov... (Continued From Page 2)

and a UN Security Council resolution enshrining the accord.

He said the Biden administration has been trying to get concessions from Tehran, instead of focusing on reviving the accord.

"The Joe Biden administration declared it is ready to resume the program and its involvement in it. But instead of taking specific decisions on resuming the resolution and the JCPOA in full, they started bargaining and pushing Iran's representatives to agree on some things that are not covered by the JCPOA, and what they would like to get from Tehran on top of the plan," Lavrov said.

The Russian diplomat said Iran and the other parties came close to an agreement in August 2022, when EU representatives presented a document to be approved by all parties, but European powers blocked that due to unknown reasons.

"Iran was ready. It was France, the UK and Germany that stalled the process. It is hard for me to see the reasons for this," he said.

"Perhaps they wanted to push Iran to do something else. They saw that Iran was ready to agree and decided to push further and put the approval off."

# UK Unite Union Reaffirms Support for Palestine, BDS

LONDON (MEMO) – Unite the Union, which represents 1.2 million workers in the UK, has passed three crucial motions reaffirming its ongoing solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle for liberation, affirming support for the Palestinian call for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions until the Zionist regime ends its violation of Palestinian rights, and condemning the government's anti-boycott bill which is currently at committee stage in the House of

Commons. In its conference, Unite noted the anti-boycott bill will shield companies engaged in human rights abuses or environmental destruction by preventing public bodies from cutting financial ties with them over abusive or illegal actions committed in a foreign state, unless expressly permitted to do so by the government. It will also violate the rights of Local Government Pension Scheme members, including members of

Unite the Union, preventing them from choosing how their deferred wages are invested.

Speaking following the passing of motions, Director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Ben Jamal, said: "At a moment when the government's anti-boycott bill seeks to delegitimize the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS), the unanimous support of Unite the Union's members at conference for motions affirming support for

BDS is crucial. Unite has made clear that it will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people and reject all efforts to delegitimize their struggle for liberation."

A further motion passed on Friday affirms the Union's recognition that the Zionist regime is practicing the crime of apartheid and calls for an end to the UK government's proposed free trade agreement with the occupying regime.

# Jordan Urges WFP to Reverse Subsidy Cuts to Refugees

AMMAN (Reuters) – Jordan's foreign minister has called on the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to reverse a decision to cut food subsidies to Syrian refugees by 1 August.

"This is not on Jordan. It is on those who are cutting support. We can't carry this burden alone," Ayman Safadi said in a tweet.

"We urge WFP and others cutting subsidies to Syrian refugees

to reverse decision," he wrote.

Representatives of the World Food Programme did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment.

The United Nations humanitarian agencies and other aid groups are struggling to keep up aid to Syrians as needs skyrocket and funding streams dry up.

More than 15 million people need aid across the country – a record number – and malnutri-

tion rates are at an all-time high. But the UN said in June that its appeal for humanitarian work in Syria this year – \$5.4 billion – had only been 11 percent funded.

At the time, the WFP announced it would cut food aid to 2.5 million of the 5.5 million people it supports. It was not immediately clear if those figures included refugees outside of Syria's borders.

Millions of Syrians have fled

their homeland since foreign-backed conflict broke out there in 2011 following.

The Arab League welcomed Syria back into the fold earlier this year, and Arab countries say it is time for Syrians seeking refuge on their territory to go home.

Safadi said on Thursday that the UN "must work to enable voluntary return. Until then, its agencies must keep sufficient support."

# Afghan Village Potters Keep Centuries-Old Tradition Alive

ISTALIF, Afghanistan (AFP) – Twice a month, Noor Agha Faqiri lights up the kiln at his small workshop around 50 kilometers (30 miles) northwest of the Afghan capital to fire a fresh batch of pottery.

Faqiri is one of dozens of potters in Qarya-e-Kulalan (potter's village) in the picturesque Istalif district, but many have ceased production since the Taliban's return to power in 2021 as the distressed economy has led to sales plummeting.

Faqiri, however, is determined to carry on.

"A business that your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents have worked on should not be let go because it is particularly blessed," the 53-year-old told AFP during a visit.

"My children are also looking at the family business and want to maintain it in any circumstances and prevent it from going under."

Afghanistan has a centuries-old tradition of pottery across the country, but Istalif's reputation for craftsmanship and quality stands out.

The main street of Qarya-e-Kulalan is lined with pottery shops, at least half shuttered because of a lack of business.

But those still open display a dazzling array of jugs, pots, bowls and plates glazed with an eye-catching turquoise, aquamarine and earth-brown finish.

Most customers are day trippers from Kabul, who make the 90-minute drive to picnic in the hills or alongside the rivers sur-

rounding the scenic village.

But wholesale merchants also occasionally show up with bigger orders for hotels and guest houses across Afghanistan -- and beyond.

"Previously, foreigners would come, and people from other provinces would come to see Istalif as it's one of the ancient, green places for tourism," said potter Abdul Haameed Mehran, 32.

Mehran throws around 70 to 100 different pieces a day, depending on demand, which are then carefully stacked to part-dry naturally before the monthly bake.

"I come here again and again because new items are always being made and they are good quality," said Shah Agha Azimi, 25, a customer from Kabul.