

Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman arrives in Algeria

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Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (left) is greeted by Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia upon his arrival at Algiers international airport. (Source: AP Photo/Anis Belghoul)

Algiers (Algeria): Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman arrived in Algeria on Sunday from Mauritania, resuming a tour of Arab countries after attending the G20 summit in Argentina. Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia received the prince in the capital Algiers, the state news agency APS said.

Before the summit, the heir to the throne of the world's top oil exporter had visited the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt and Tunisia. On his way to Algeria he had stopped over in Mauritania, where Saudi Arabia pledged to build a large hospital in the capital Nouakchott, state media said.

The crown prince is on his first trip abroad since the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, which has strained Saudi Arabia's ties with the West and battered the prince's image abroad.

Saudi Arabia has said the prince had no prior knowledge of the murder. After offering numerous contradictory explanations, Riyadh said last month that Khashoggi had been killed and his body dismembered when negotiations to persuade him to return to Saudi Arabia failed.

Algerian-Saudi investments and trade relations, especially in the oil and petrochemical sectors, will be discussed during the two-day visit, APS said on Saturday. Algeria is one of the few Arab countries that has good relations with Saudi Arabia and its arch-rival Iran, both fellow OPEC members.

Algiers also has strong ties with Qatar, with which Saudi Arabia and three other Arab states severed trade and transport ties in June 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism and Iran. Qatar denies the allegations.

Algeria is also on good terms with Turkey, whose relations with Saudi Arabia have been strained by the Khashoggi killing. The Saudi prince is unlikely to face protests over the murder as he did in Tunisia, as demonstrations are banned in Algiers.

But a group of prominent journalists and intellectuals has written an open letter opposing his visit, saying it is "unethical and politically inappropriate".

- Reuters