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Saad Selim

Editor-in-Chief  
Mohamed Kassem

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## In Figures

AT least 17 people have been killed in fighting between insurgents from Somalia's al-Shabaab group and clan militias in the country's central semi-autonomous region of Galmudug, residents and the group told Reuters yesterday. Somali state-run Radio Muqdisho reported on its website yesterday that the fighting in the Harardheere area, which started on Wednesday, had been triggered by alleged al-Shabaab conscription of teenagers into their ranks.



PRESIDENT Abdel Fattah El Sisi during his meeting with Prime Minister Dr Moustafa Madbouli and the newly-appointed Health Minister, Dr Hala Zayed, yesterday.

## Sisi directs gov't to expedite health service improvement

Ashraf Sadek

PRESIDENT Abdel Fattah El Sisi yesterday called on the government to expedite development of the national healthcare system and improve its services, stressing the importance of upgrading the human and material resources of the health sector.

The president was speaking at a meeting with Prime Minister Dr Moustafa Madbouli and Health Minister Dr Hala Zayed, the Presidency Spokesman, Ambassador Bassam Radi, said.

The meeting was called by President Sisi to review the latest developments in a plan for upgrading the healthcare and health insurance system, Spokesman Radi said.

The prime minister and Dr Zayed reviewed with President Sisi the progress of work on the new national health insurance system.

The government had already taken the financial and legislative steps for establishing the country's first comprehensive health insurance system. Its implementation will start in Port Said governorate.

The new mandatory system, which covers all citizens, will be later applied in the Suez, Ismailia, Northern Sinai and Southern Sinai governorates.

To ensure the success of the system, Health Minister Zayed explained that the ministry had started improving the country's hospitals and health facilities.

"The improvements include the provision of advanced medical equipment, a modern infrastructure and training programmes for the doctors and nursing staffs in these facilities," Dr Zayed said.

According to the available documents, the new health insurance system, which has been designed to cover all members of the family of each of the insured citizen, would be formed of three main bodies.

One would be for comprehensive health and social insurance services. Another would be the medical service component of the healthcare system. The third would cover accreditation and monitoring as well as the drawing up of quality standards to be applicable in all healthcare facilities.

The state will bear the cost of extending insurance to citizens considered incapable of joining the system and to the neediest segments of the public.

President Sisi directed Prime Minister Madbouli and Minister Zayed to add 18 teaching hospitals to the healthcare facilities, where the system would be applied in various governorates.

Such a move would help the

patients receive the medical treatment without having to leave their governorates or to go to a hospital in another governorate, President Sisi said.

President Sisi also directed Madbouli and Zayed to improve the working conditions for the staff in all government-run healthcare facilities in co-operation with local councils and non-government organisations (NGOs).

During the meeting, Zayed reviewed with President Sisi the ministry's plan for improving the overall preventive and curative medical services.

The plan, she said, is designed for developing 29 ministry-run hospitals in the governorates and providing them with advanced equipment and highly-trained medical personnel.

These hospitals, Dr Zayed said, would provide a variety of high quality preventive and curative medical services.

Their outpatient and in-patient clinics would offer cardiology, marrow-transplant, Nephrology, liver, neuroses, and surgical services to the patients, she said.

Dr Zayed also said that the ministry's plan of action included improving the maternity care, family planning and child spacing services that were being offered to women nationwide in order to reduce the population growth.

## Foreign reserves stand at \$44.26b

## Sisi endorses LE1.7 trillion budget for FY 2018/2019

PRESIDENT Abdel Fattah El Sisi yesterday endorsed a LE1.7 trillion state budget for the Fiscal Year 2018/2019 after it had been ratified by the House of Deputies (parliament).

The new budget, the largest in Egypt's modern history, was put into effect last Sunday.

In a related development, the Minister of Finance, Mohamed Maet, told reporters yesterday that the government achieved a budget surplus of LE4 billion (\$223 million) in the current FY 2017/2018.

The government expects the budget deficit to stand at 8.4 per cent, the minister added.

Minister Maet said revenues expected from the FY 2018/2019 budget are around LE1.9 trillion.

The Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) said yesterday that the foreign reserves increased by \$120

million by the end of June to reach \$44.258 billion.

The state's foreign reserves started to rebound since the delivery of the \$12 billion three-year International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan programme in 2016.

The IMF Executive Board approved in November 2016 a three-year Extended Fund Facility (EFT) loan to Egypt worth \$12 billion to support its economic reform programme.

Egypt received the fourth tranche of the IMF loan in the amount of \$2 billion. This step came after the board's approval of the fourth tranche last Friday, as a result of the IMF delegation's 16 day-visit that took place in May to review the state's reform programme.

The current average of foreign reserves covers about eight months of Egypt's commodity imports, which is higher than the

global average of about three months of commodity imports.

The discovery of large amounts of offshore gas in Egyptian waters, including the giant Zohr gas field, has caused hope for another source of revenue with Egypt as a potential gas hub for the region.

Petroleum Minister Tarek el-Mulla told reporters yesterday that Egypt was committed to paying off its debts to foreign oil companies by the end of 2019.

Those debts stood at \$1.2 billion at the end of June, their lowest since 2010, he said.

El-Mulla repeated that Egypt intended to increase production from the Zohr field to 2 billion cubic feet of gas per day by the end of this year - up from current levels of around 1.2 billion.

Discovered in 2015 by Italy's Eni, Zohr contains an estimated 30 trillion cubic feet of gas.

## Today's Weather

Cairo	...37	...24
Alexandria	...31	...23
Sharm el-Sheikh	...38	...29
Hurghada	...37	...29
Aswan	...42	...28
Luxor	...41	...26
Suez	...35	...24
Taba	...36	...28

## Oil nears 3-1/2 years high despite Trump demand

LONDON (Reuters) - Oil traded near its highest in 3-1/2 years yesterday, boosted by potential disruptions to flows from Iran and the Middle East despite a fresh demand from US President Donald Trump that OPEC cut prices.

Brent crude futures were at \$78.12 a barrel at 10:50 GMT, down 12 cents.

US crude futures were up 32 cents at \$74.46, within sight of yesterday's 3-1/2-year high above \$75.

## US Navy vows to protect commerce in face of Iran threat

LONDON - The US Navy stands ready to ensure freedom of navigation and free flow of commerce, a spokesman for the US military's Central Command said yesterday, after Iran warned it will block oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has threatened in recent days to close the strait, a vital route for world oil supplies, if Washington tries to cut Tehran's exports.

An Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander said on Wednesday Iran would block any exports of crude for the Gulf in retaliation for hostile US action.

"The US and its partners provide and promote security and stability in the region," Central Command Spokesman Navy Captain Bill Urban said in an email to Reuters.

Asked what would be the US Naval Forces reaction if Iran blocks the Strait of Hormuz, he

said: "Together, we stand ready to ensure the freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce wherever international law allows."

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Navy (IRGCN) lacks a strong navy and instead focuses on an asymmetric warfare capability in the Gulf. It possesses many speed boats and portable anti-ship missile launchers and can lay naval mines.

A senior US military leader said in 2012 the Guards have the ability to block the Strait of Hormuz "for a period of time" but the United States would take action to reopen it in such an event.

In May, US President Donald Trump pulled out of a multinational deal under which sanctions on Iran were lifted in return for curbs to its nuclear programme. Washington has since told countries they must stop buying Iranian oil from Nov. 4 or face financial measures.



NEW COMMANDERS: The Egyptian army stands strong and capable of protecting the homeland against any threat, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Mohamed Farid, said yesterday. Lt Gen Farid made the fresh affirmation during a meeting with a number of senior army officers, who were nominated to assume higher posts in the ministry. "The main task of the Armed Forces is to guard each and every yard of the land of Egypt," he said, stressing that the new commanders should always adhere to the noble principles of the Egyptian military.

## Hidden ancient artefacts found in Alex

HUNDREDS of ancient pottery items have been discovered in an Alexandria museum in a hiding place "most probably" created during World War II, Antiquities Ministry said.

Pots and other receptacles dating back to Greek, Roman, Coptic and Islamic eras were discovered "during restoration work" in a garden inside the Greco-Roman museum of Alexandria, known as 'Patio', the ministry said in a statement.

"These pots were most probably hidden by (British) archaeologist Alan Rowe and employees in the museum's garden during World War



II", Ayman Ashmawy, head of Egyptian antiquities at the ministry, said in the statement.

The artefacts were hidden to "be protected from looting or being destroyed by repeated bombardments

during the war", he said. "The hiding process was carried out quickly without being documented or recorded on the museum's list", he added.

The haul includes "Hidari" cremation urns - intended for ashes during Greek times, said another official, Nadia Khadre.

"The hiding place also contains a collection of pottery of different sizes and shapes", said Khadre, head of the central department of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities.

Other items include coloured pots, large dishes and tableware from the Greek, Roman and Byzantine eras.

## Syrian rebels back to talks with Russians

AMMAN (Reuters) - Jordanian mediation has brought Syrian rebel negotiators back to the table with Russian officers to discuss a final deal to end fighting and restore Syrian state control of Deraa province, a Syrian opposition spokesman said.

Ibrahim al Jabawi said the two sides were expected to hold talks this evening in the southern town of Busra al Sham. Four rounds of talks have been held there since Saturday, without reaching agreement.

Rebel officials say the main differences include whether the rebels surrender their weapons in one go or in phases, before handing over their areas to state control under Russian military police supervision.