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The Egyptian Gazette

ذی اچیشیان جازیت

Established 1880

www.egyptiangazette.net.eg

Board Chairman
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Issue No: 44,725

Saturday, July 7, 2018

Price: LE4

In Figures

THE number of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Europe has fallen dramatically, but the likelihood of dying while attempting the dangerous voyage has grown exponentially, the UN said yesterday. So far this year, more than 46,000 asylum-seekers and migrants have reached Europe's shores after crossing the Mediterranean Sea – five times fewer than during the first half of 2016, the UN refugee agency said.

Sisi launches 1st phase of health insurance project

Ashraf Sadek

PRESIDENT Abdel Fattah El Sisi yesterday directed the government to start implementing the first phase of the multi-component National Health Insurance Project.

Presidency Spokesman Ambassador Bassam Radi said that the phase would include a set of preliminary steps that would be taken in accordance with the already set timetable and action plan of the project.

These steps include shortening the waiting lists of patients who needed to undergo surgeries at government-run hospitals within a period of six months.

The phase of the project included upgrading 47 government-run hospitals and university hospitals in the country's 27 governorates, Ambassador Radi said.

The phase also would ensure the availability of a strategic reserve of baby formulas, vaccinations and serums for more than 45 million citizens. A big pharmaceutical company would be contracted by the govern-



President Sisi

ment for providing these products.

It also incorporates conducting a comprehensive survey for the early detection and treatment of Hepatitis C patients nationwide. This survey would run for two years.

The phase also includes upgrading the healthcare facilities and health information system in Port Said

Governorate, where the health insurance system would be applied after one year. Later, it would be applied in the governorates of Suez, Ismailia, Northern Sinai and Southern Sinai.

The new system comes within the framework of the state drive to elevate the standards of the healthcare services offered to the citizens.

The new health insurance system, which had been designed to cover all members of the family of each of the insured citizens, would be formed of three main bodies: one for comprehensive health and social insurance services, another for the medical service component of the healthcare system and a third for accreditation and monitoring as well as for the drawing up of quality standards that will 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.

On Thursday, President Sisi called on the government to expedite development of the national health care system and improve its services.



FOREIGN Minister Sameh Shoukri and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz during their talks in Vienna yesterday.

Egypt welcomes more Austrian investments

Staff report

VIENNA – Two senior Austrian officials yesterday praised the successful economic reforms that had been launched by Egypt, which they described as a pillar of stability and security in the Middle East.

Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and the Chairman of the Austrian National Council Wolfgang Sobotkaa affirmed that Vienna was keen on the furtherance of cementing its economic and political ties with Cairo, which had enormous potential.

Chancellor Kurz and Mr Sobotkaa made the statements during their separate meetings with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukri, who is on an official visit to Vienna.

They praised the long-standing friendly co-operation between Cairo and Vienna at the economic and developmental levels, adding that Austria was looking forward to elevating its co-operation with Egypt in all domains.

In this regard, Chancellor Kurz and

Mr Sobotkaa said that Austria was keen on supporting Egypt, which plays a vital and central role in maintaining regional stability and security.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid quoted Minister Shoukri as telling Chancellor Kurz and Mr Sobotkaa that Egypt was looking forward to more participation by the Austrian investors in the ongoing mega development projects that were being implemented by the Cairo government.

Minister Shoukri said his discussions with Chancellor Kurz and Mr Sobotkaa, which dealt with regional and domestic issues of mutual interest, had been cordial and reflected the attitude of the leaders of both countries for the consolidation of bilateral relations in all fields.

On this issue, Mr Sobotkaa, whose country will hold the rotating presidency of the European Union next year, said that he was looking forward to setting up an Austrian-Egyptian Friendship Group whose members would work on enhancing co-operation ties.

The Shoukri-Kurz meeting also dealt with a host of issues of mutual concern such as Egyptian efforts for combatting illegal migration and terrorism, which constituted the biggest challenges facing the Middle East region, Spokesman Abu Zeid said.

Minister Shoukri and Mr Sobotkaa also discussed the latest developments pertaining to the Syrian and Libyan crises, he said.

Mr Sobotkaa said that Austria fully valued the Egyptian efforts for combatting terrorism and illegal migration as well as Cairo's endeavours to find political settlements to the regional crises.

Minister Shoukri said that the whole world was facing the real danger of terrorism that demanded the harmonisation of efforts to confront and eliminate it.

He also highlighted to the Austrian official some of the giant projects that are being implemented in Egypt.

He indicated that Egypt was looking forward to increasing the level of Austrian participation in these projects.



FOLLOW-UP MEETING: Prime Minister Dr Moustafa Madbouli yesterday presided over a cabinet meeting to follow-up the progress of works to build new 23-kilometre-long motorway in Alexandria. During the meeting, Premier Madbouli stressed the importance of completing this project according to the pre-set time tables and also in line with the highest safety standards. He also underscored the positive implications of this project on Alexandria's investment potentials and easing the traffic of people and goods in the city.

France beat Uruguay 2-0 to reach semis

NIZHY NOVGOROD (News Wires) – France edged into the semi finals of the World Cup as goals from Raphael Varane and Antoine Griezmann gave them a 2-0 win over Uruguay.

Didier Deschamps' side can now look forward to a meeting with either Brazil or Belgium in the final four after this victory over difficult South American opposition. The absence of Edinson Cavani through injury ended up costing Oscar Tabarez's side who looked toothless for much of the game.

Varane gave Les Blues the lead five minutes from half time, glancing home a header from a clever Griezmann free kick delivery.

Israeli war jets hit Golan village

BEIRUT – A pro-Damascus commander said an Israeli airstrike hit a Syrian village yesterday at the Golan Heights frontier, where the Israeli military said it had struck a Syrian army post.

The commander in the regional alliance that backs Damascus told Reuters the strike on a hill in Khan Arnabeh village in Qunaitra Province did not cause casualties.

In a statement, the Israeli military said it had hit a Syrian army location that shelled a buffer zone on the Golan frontier during fighting with rebels.

In another development, Syrian government forces seized control of the Nassib border crossing with Jordan yesterday, Hezbollah's war media centre said, after Russia concluded a surrender agreement with rebels in the area.

A Syrian rebel spokesman said the Russian-mediated ceasefire agreement in eastern parts of



A FILE photo of smoke rising above rebel-held areas east of the city of Daraa during reported airstrikes by Syrian regime forces on Thursday.

Deraa Province included a withdrawal of government forces from several towns in the south.

Ibrahim Jabawi, the spokesman, said local forces overseen by Russia would take charge of the area.

Jabawi earlier said rebels had agreed on a phased hand-over of their weapons and the deployment

of Russian military police in the area near the Jordanian border as part of the deal.

Jabawi said that forces in south Syria are advancing along the frontier with Jordan and will soon reach a border crossing in rebel hands in a push to recapture one of the country's last rebel strongholds.

Houthis reject UN proposal

UNITED NATIONS (News Wires) – The Houthis refused a UN proposal to withdraw from the city of Hodeidah and its port and to hand over management to the UN, Al Arabiya satellite TV channel correspondent in New York reported yesterday.

The Houthis have instead proposed that Hodeidah and its port be under joint management with the UN.

These developments were conveyed to the UN Security Council during a closed-door briefing by UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, who informed the council of the results of his talks in Sana'a and Aden.

Meanwhile, the Security Council gave strong backing to efforts by Griffiths to start new talks between Yemen's warring parties and reaffirmed that "a political solution remains the only way to end the conflict."

Naval drill with France to boost Red Sea security

THE Egyptian and French naval forces yesterday launched a new phase of a joint exercise to boost security in the Red Sea, the military said in a statement.

The exercise comes within the Armed Forces' annual framework of joint drills. Military ties between Egypt and France have enhanced recently, the statement said.

The exercise, which has been running for days, seeks to strengthen the abilities of both countries in combat and use modern naval tactics and systems, it added.

The drill included manoeuvres in which the highly-trained Egyptian and French officers used various models of speedboats, frigates and

rocket launchers, as well as troop carriers.

During the exercise, the officers and soldiers demonstrated their abilities to protect Egyptian seas and skies during times of peace and war.

A flotilla of speedboats joined the drill. Their young commanders exhibited their ability to protect the nation's coasts against infiltration, smuggling and terrorist operations whether by day or night. They also showed their ability to safeguard giant ships and tankers.

The naval drill also incorporated a firing exercise with live ammunition during which new speedboats and helicopters destroyed moving and stationary targets.