

Study returns to normal at el-Arish University

2



Camel milk business thrives in Kenya

3



England reaches World Cup semis

4



China open for trade with East Europe

5



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In Figures

BENHAZI – Unidentified gunmen killed two workers and kidnapped two others at a water plant in southeastern Libya early yesterday, the second attack targeting water facilities in two days, officials said. "An armed attack was carried out by terrorist groups on the Tazirbu site causing havoc, looting, killing and terrorising families, children and the workers who ensure the supply of water to cities," said a statement from the Great Man-made River Project, a pipe network supplying water to the Libyan Sahara.

Thousands of Syrians back to Deraa after truce deal

BEIRUT – Syrian soldiers yesterday celebrated the recapture of the main border crossing with Jordan, raising portraits of President Bashar Assad and tearing down rebel flags.

Troops re-captured the Nassib border crossing on Friday, after rebels announced they had reached an agreement with Russian mediators to end the violence in the southern province of Deraa and surrender the crossing.

State-run *Ikhbariya* TV, monitored by AP, showed troops at the crossing yesterday, some flashing victory signs and pumping fists in the air.

Syria's government has regained control of the vital Nassib border crossing with Jordan, three years after losing it to rebels. Of its 19 border points with Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey, the regime now controls around half, including all of those with Lebanon, one each with Jordan and Iraq and two closed crossings with Turkey.

One officer told the TV that troops have taken up positions along the border with Jordan and

are removing illegal crossing points.

In a related development, thousands of displaced Syrians headed to Deraa yesterday after the ceasefire deal, an activist group told AFP.

Under the agreement announced Friday after talks between rebels and regime ally Moscow, opposition fighters will hand over territory and heavy weapons in Deraa province near the Jordanian border.

The Russia-backed regime offensive has displaced around 320,000 people since June 19, the United Nations says, including tens of thousands who fled south to the sealed border with Jordan.

Calm reigned over the region yesterday as the two sides finalised the ceasefire deal, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said.

"People have started to return to their homes since yesterday, taking advantage of the calm,"

Observatory chief Rami Abdel-Rahman said.



SYRIAN families returning to their homes in towns and villages situated on the eastern outskirts of Deraa yesterday. The Syrian regime reached a ceasefire deal with rebels in the country's south, the official SANA news agency said.

"More than 20,000 people have set off for home so far, heading to areas for which an accord has been reached in the southeastern Deraa countryside," he said.

But others "are scared to return to regime-controlled areas, fearing their children will be arrested,"

Abdel-Rahman said. The accord follows a string of similar deals with rebels for other areas of Syria, which have seen the regime retake more than 60 per cent of the country, according to the Observatory.

A government takeover of

Deraa would be a symbolic victory for President Bashar Assad as the province was the cradle of the uprising against him seven years ago that led to civil war.

More than 150 civilians have been killed in the regime bombing campaign on Deraa.

FM to attend China-Arab forum in Beijing

FOREIGN Minister is scheduled to fly to Beijing to represent Egypt at the 8th Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab States Co-operation Forum, which would start on Tuesday, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said yesterday.

Minister Shoukri, who wrapped up successful visits to Germany and Austria on Friday, would attend the forum's discussions that were expected to focus on consolidating friendship between China and Arab states, Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid said in a statement.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, foreign ministers or representatives from the Arab states and Secretary-General of the League of Arab States will attend the discussions.

During the forum, the Chinese and Arab officials would also hold talks on advancing the Belt and Road Initiative and other international and regional issues of common interest.

China announced on Thursday that President Xi Jinping would deliver a speech at the opening ceremony of the forum's ministerial meeting that was expected to focus on the means of strengthening high-level exchanges between China and Arab countries.

Pope: Walls, occupation hamper ME peace

BARI, Italy (News Wires) – Pope Francis led a summit of Christian leaders on how to promote peace in the Middle East yesterday and said building walls, occupying territories and religious fanaticism would not resolve conflict in the region.

Pope Francis also repeated his view that the "status quo" of the contested city of Jerusalem should be respected, and backed a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

He convened the summit in the southern Italian city of Bari that for centuries has been a gateway to the Middle East and home to the relics of St. Nicholas, a

figure venerated in both the Western and Eastern branches of Christianity.

"Truces maintained by walls and displays of power will not lead to peace, but only the concrete desire to listen and to engage in dialogue will," he said in his second speech of the day, after a private meeting among the religious leaders.

"Let there be an end to the few profiting from the sufferings of many. No more occupying territories and thus tearing people apart," he said.

Pope Francis said every community in the Middle East should be protected, "not simply the majority".



POPE Francis lighting a candle inside the crypta of the St. Nicholas Basilica in Bari, southern Italy, yesterday.

Lebanese woman gets 8 years for insulting Egyptians

THE Heliopolis Misdemeanour Court yesterday sentenced a Lebanese woman to eight years in prison after she was convicted of posting a video on her Facebook that insulted the Egyptians and their government, legal sources said.

The convicted woman, Mona el-Mazboh, had been arrested at Cairo airport at the end of her stay in Egypt two months ago after her outspoken video went viral on social media, the sources said.

The court found her guilty of

deliberately spreading false rumours that would harm society, attacking religion, and public indecency, the sources said.

Her arrest was in response to several legal complaints that accused her of insulting the Egyptians in the Facebook video that went viral online and triggered outrage in the country.

Ms. Mazboh, who was detained and tried upon an order from the chief prosecutor, had the right to appeal against yesterday's ruling, the sources said.

Media head to justify gag order on hospital coverage

THE prosecutors have ordered the country's top media regulator to be summoned for questioning over his decision to issue a gag order on corruption allegations made against a children's cancer hospital, the official Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported yesterday.

In a statement, the Chief Public Prosecutor, Mr Nabil Ahmed Sadek, said that the decision by Mr Makram Mohamed Ahmed, head of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, constituted an "infringement" on judicial and executive authorities. He said the gag order was null and non-binding.

Earlier, Mr Makram told local media that his decision was meant to preserve the hospital's reputation pending the completion of a probe into the corruption allegations.

49 killed, 48 missing as torrential rain pounds Japan

TOKYO – Forty nine people have been killed and 48 are unaccounted for in western and central Japan as torrential rain pounds the area, public broadcaster NHK said yesterday, with more than 1.6 million evacuated from their homes.

Japan's Meteorological Agency retained special weather warnings for three prefectures in the main island of Honshu, down from five, and urged vigilance against landslides, rising rivers and strong winds amid what it called "historic" rains.

Helicopter footage showed people on their roofs waving for help in Kurashiki, and Japanese soldiers rescuing children by boat from a flooded river in Hiroshima.

In Motoyama, a town on Shikoku Island, about 373 miles from Tokyo, 583 mm (23 inches) of rain fell between Friday and yesterday in the morning, the agency said according to Reuters.

Although a weather front had settled between western and eastern Japan, there was a risk heavy rains would continue as warm air flowed towards the front, it added, with already-saturated areas facing more rain today.

Among the dead were a man who fell from a bridge into a river in western Hiroshima city, and a 77-year-old man in Takashima, 56km (35 miles) east of the ancient capital of Kyoto, who was swept into a canal as he worked to remove debris, NHK said.

Four people in Ehime, Hiroshima and Yamaguchi prefectures were in critical condition after being injured in landslides, it added.

Yesterday, more than 1.6 million people had been ordered to evacuate their homes for fear of flooding and further landslides, with 3.1 million more advised to leave, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said.



TORRENTIAL rain has pounded western and central Japan and forced more than 1.6 million to leave their homes.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said about 48,000 police, firefighters and members of Japan's Self-Defence Forces were responding to appeals for help. The weather also hit industry.

Some automakers halted production as the rain and flooding disrupted supply chains and risked workers' safety, Kyodo news agency said. Mitsubishi Motors Corp (7211.T) halted operations at one

plant because it could not get parts, Kyodo said. Mazda Motor Corp (7261.T) stopped production lines at two plants so employees would not have to travel in hazardous conditions.