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In Figures

A TURKISH court sentenced 72 defendants to life in prison yesterday for their role in killing 34 people when rogue soldiers seized control of a suspension bridge in Istanbul two years ago during an attempted coup, state media said. The court sentenced the 72 defendants, who included a colonel and major in the Turkish military, for "attempting to destroy constitutional order". Another 27 defendants were sentenced to more than 15 years in prison for helping that effort, according to state-run Anadolu news agency.

FM joins meeting on Syria in Belgium Assad troops hoist flag in Deraa

FOREIGN Minister Sameh Shoukri attended a meeting of the mini-international group on Syria that took place in Belgium early yesterday.

The top diplomats of Britain, the US, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Jordan attended the meeting, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid said.

Egypt was invited for the first time to the group's meeting in appreciation of the efforts it had been exerting to support the political settlement in Syria, Abu Zeid said.

Egypt also has opened communication channels with all Syrian parties involved in the stalemate, the spokesman said, citing Egypt's role in unifying the Syrian opposition factions and resuming political negotiations.

The talks tackled means of pushing forward the political settlement and the importance of releasing a call by United Nations envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura to hold the first meeting of the constitution-drafting committee as a first step for resuming talks, which were suspended six months ago.

During the meeting, Shoukri reviewed Egypt's efforts to push forward a settlement of the Syrian crisis.

He underlined the importance of a swift political solution to the crisis, saying that this solution should maintain the unity of the Syrian lands and prevent foreign interference.

FM Shoukri highlighted the importance of maintaining the fight against the Islamic State terrorist group (Daesh) to deprive the group of the chance to find safe havens in



FOREIGN Minister Sameh Shoukri (2nd L) attending a meeting of the mini-international group on Syria that took place in Belgium early yesterday.

the region, especially in North Africa or the Sahel and Sahara.

The Syrian government raised the national flag yesterday over areas of Deraa city that have been in rebel hands for years, a major victory for President Bashar al-Assad in the birthplace of the revolt against his rule.

State television said the army hoisted the flag near the post office, the only government building in the portion of the city that had been held by rebels since the early days of the uprising that began there in 2011 with large protests.

Government forces backed by Russian airstrikes have recovered swathes of Deraa province in the last three weeks, advancing unopposed by Assad's Western and regional foes into the strategically vital region near Jordan and Israel.

It marks another milestone in Assad's efforts to recover control of Syria, where civil war is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven some 11 million people from their homes.

The campaign in the southwest is

now expected to target rebel-held enclaves at the frontier with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israel signaled it would not impede the offensive, even as it struck Syrian army posts near the frontier in retaliation for a drone incursion.

With critical help from Russia and Iran, Assad has now recovered most of Syria. Anti-Assad rebels still control a chunk of the north-west, and the northeast and a large chunk of the east are controlled by Kurdish-led militia.

Chief of Staff inspects Sinai troops

Ashraf Sadek

LIEUTENANT General Mohamed Farid, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, yesterday asserted that the heroes of the Armed Forces were exerting great efforts to fight terrorism in Northern and Central Sinai.

During a surprise visit to the Third Field Army troops in Central Sinai, Lt. Gen. Farid noted that the Armed Forces were undertaking the task of securing and protecting the nation on all axial directions not only the Sinai.

During his meeting with the unit commanders, Lt. Gen. Farid referred to efforts and sacrifices made by the Armed Forces. Tribal chiefs of Central and Northern Sinai attended the meeting.

The visit came within the framework of Lt. Gen. Farid's keenness on following up the progress of the comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018 now being carried out across the country.

He ordered the commanders to

maintain the highest level of preparedness to swiftly and effectively thwart any action or plot aiming at undermining Egypt's national security.

Earlier, Lt. Gen. Farid inspected the army combat units, formations and land patrols that were assigned to defend and secure Northern and Central Sinai.

He praised the high capabilities and efficiency of the troops and their efforts to precisely hit terrorist targets and eliminate the terrorists in Central and Northern Sinai, where a comprehensive counter-terrorism operation had been going on since February 9.

From a command centre in Central Sinai, Lt. Gen. Farid, who followed-up the progress of the operation activities, reiterated to the commanders in charge of the army units the importance of up-keeping the morale of troops and ensuring that they received proper sustenance and administrative backup.

He also discussed with commanders their anti-terrorism plans and ways of maintaining Sinai's safety.



LIEUTENANT General Mohamed Farid, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, During a visit to the Third Field Army troops in Central Sinai.

'Sudan extends ceasefire with rebels'

KHARTOUM (News wires) – Sudan has extended a unilateral ceasefire with rebels fighting in three states to overthrow the government, the presidential palace said in a decree yesterday.

The government has been fighting rebels in the state of Darfur in eastern Sudan since 2003, but the level of violence has been in decline for three years.

In South Kordofan and the Blue

Nile, northern members of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) who had remained in the country after South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011, have kept up their fight against the president's rule.

"President Omar al-Bashir has issued a presidential decision to extend the ceasefire in all fields of operations until December 31, 2018," the presidential palace said in a statement.



QUEEN RECEIVED SHEIKH EL-TAYYEB: British Queen Elizabeth II yesterday conferred with the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayyeb, who is on an official visit to UK to attend a Muslim-Christian dialogue. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, escorted Sheikh el-Tayyeb to the meeting. "It was an honour for myself and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar to be received by Her Majesty The Queen at Windsor Castle today," Archbishop Welby wrote on his Twitter account.

10 dead, 25 injured in road crash

TEN persons were killed and 25 wounded yesterday after a truck collided with a bus on a highway in Mersa Matrouh Governorate, a Health Ministry official said.

"Four of the injured people need special care but their conditions are not very serious, while the others are having normal fractures," said Mohsen Taha, Health Ministry's Undersecretary in Matrouh.

The police are currently investigat-

ing the accident that took place on Alexandria-Matrouh Highway near al-Awama town of Dabaa district, he said, adding that ambulances were deployed in the area of the incident to ensure swift rescue operation for the wounded and moving the bodies of the dead to nearby hospitals.

Minister of Health Dr Hala Zayed ordered all army and police hospitals to provide all medical care to the wounded.

Cigarette prices go up

THE top cigarette maker, Eastern Tobacco Company, yesterday raised prices by 10 to 15 per cent, or LE1.5-3, Chairman Mohammed Othman said.

Prices have soared in import-dependent Egypt ever since it floated its pound currency in late 2016 as part of IMF-backed reforms.

In a televised interview late on Wednesday, Othman said the price hike is intended to cover a new tax imposed by the government to raise money for healthcare services.

Japan tackles clean-up as toll tops 200

TOKYO – Japanese rescue workers searched the ruins of homes yesterday looking for dozens of people still missing after deadly rains that killed more than 200 people.

Operations were under way to dig out and clear up after the devastating floods and landslides that engulfed entire neighbourhoods.

But with around 60 people still feared missing, local authorities said they would continue searching house by house looking for survivors or victims.

"The critical 72 hours have passed," acknowledged Mutsunari Imawaka, an official with Okayama prefecture, one of the worst-hit regions.

"But we will continue our search believing there are still survivors," he told AFP.

He said at least 18 people were missing in Okayama alone, and that several thousand people were checking houses across the region.

Television footage showed dozens of rescuers, including troops,

removing massive rocks with mechanical diggers from houses buried in landslides.

Rescuers were also manually shovelling dirt to search for missing people.

The rains are the deadliest weather-related disaster in over three decades in Japan, and the size of the death toll has raised questions about whether authorities were sufficiently prepared.

Government Spokesman Yoshihide Suga said the death toll from the disaster reached 201.