

27 planes hit
Kuwait sky with
aerobatic shows



Resistance
weakening as
Iraq battles IS



Russia's Mutko
'barred from
FIFA post'



150 Fils

S KOREAN COURT THROWS PRESIDENT OUT OF OFFICE

RULING TRIGGERS SNAP ELECTION TO ELECT NEW LEADER



Min 14°
Max 30°



RIYADH: Saudis attend a music concert by Rashed Al-Majed (inset) in Riyadh on Thursday night. — AFP



SLOWLY BUT SURELY, MUSIC COMING BACK TO SAUDI

RIYADH: Legendary Arab singer Rashed Al-Majed gave his fans three encores in the Saudi capital on Thursday night. Why not? They had waited about three decades for such a show. Majed opened for Mohammed Abdu as part of what one music lover called a "paradigm shift" in the conservative Islamic kingdom, which has cautiously begun introducing entertainment despite opposition from Muslim hardliners.

Both singers have Saudi roots and are popular throughout the Arab world but fans said Abdu had not sung in the Saudi capital since 1988. Local media reported there had been no other concerts in Riyadh since the early 1990s, after which they were effectively banned although private musical events did occur. "We missed them a lot," Jamal Al-Onzi, a 31-year-old bank worker, said of the singers. He was among the audience of 2,000 — all men—who paid between 500 and 2,500 riyals (\$133-\$667) for the performances at King Fahad Cultural Centre hall.

"We sold out in 30 minutes," Habib Rahal, of the organizers Rotana Music, said. Dressed almost exclusively in traditional white thobes and chequered headgear, the crowd was initially sedate despite the infectious drum beats and melodious strings that accompanied Majed.

In the shadows, one spectator mouthed the words and moved his arms in time to the music. Another tapped his left hand on his thobe. There was lots of enthusiastic shouting and calls of "Rashed"

before the energy peaked, pushing the singer to his three encores. They swayed in time to the music. Some even stood up to dance.

After more than 90 minutes, it was time to do it all again when Abdu took the stage at around midnight. Less pop-influenced than Majed, the elder man sings patriotic and traditionally romantic songs. "I have feelings of happiness and joy and pleasure," he told reporters before ending his long absence from a Riyadh stage. Abdu gained fame long before Abdulaziz al-Shudayyid was born, but the 21-year-old student said the veteran artist "sings for my generation."

"I know by heart all his songs," Shudayyid said. Although conservatism still runs deep, there is pressure for change in a country where more than half of the population is younger than 25 and people are connected to the wider world through the internet. They have a champion at the highest levels of power in Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, 31, who is pushing economic diversification and social reform of the oil-dependent kingdom.

One of the most visible aspects has been entertainment, partly out of an economic motive to get Saudis spending at home rather than elsewhere in the Gulf. The kingdom still bans alcohol, public cinemas and theatres. It usually segregates unrelated men and women in restaurants and other public places. — AFP

SEOUL: South Korea's Constitutional Court removed President Park Geun-hye from office yesterday over a graft scandal involving the country's conglomerates at a time of rising tensions with North Korea and China. The ruling sparked protests from hundreds of her supporters, two of whom were killed in clashes with police outside the court, and a festive rally by those who had demanded her ouster who celebrated justice being served.

"We did it. We the citizens, the sovereign of this country, opened a new chapter in history," Lee Tae-ho, who leads a movement to oust Park that has held mostly peaceful rallies in downtown involving millions, told a large gathering in Seoul.

Park becomes South Korea's first democratically elected leader to be forced from office, capping months of paralysis and turmoil over the corruption scandal that also landed the head of the Samsung conglomerate in detention and on trial.

A snap presidential election will be held within 60 days. She did not appear in court and a spokesman said she would not be making any comment. Nor would she leave the presidential Blue House residence yesterday. "Park is not leaving the Blue House today," Blue House spokesman Kim Dong Jo told Reuters.

Park was stripped of her powers after parliament voted to impeach her but has remained in the president's official compound. The court's acting chief judge, Lee Jung-mi, said Park had violated the constitution and law "throughout her term", and despite the objections of parliament and the media, she had concealed the truth and cracked down on critics.

Park has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing. The ruling to uphold parliament's Dec. 9 vote to impeach her marks a dramatic fall from grace of South Korea's first woman president and daughter of Cold War military dictator Park Chung-hee. — Reuters (See Page 7)



The ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye

TERROR SUSPECT KILLED IN SAUDI POLICE SHOOTOUT

DUBAI: A wanted man has been killed in Saudi Arabia's oil-producing Eastern province after an exchange of gunfire while police were searching a neighborhood where he was hiding, state news agency SPA reported yesterday.

The man, Mustafa Ali Abdullah Al-Madad, was wanted by security forces for his involvement in "a number of terror crimes against the citizens and security personnel". He was killed in the governorate of Qatif. SPA said Madad refused to comply with security forces when asked to hand himself over, and opened fire at the police. Police fired back, resulting in the man's death. The official SPA news agency reported that one officer was wounded and hospitalized after the exchange of fire.

The Eastern Province city of Qatif has been the focal point of unrest among Saudi Arabia's protests in early 2011 calling for an end to discrimination against the minority sect and for democratic reforms in the kingdom. At least nine police have been shot dead since 2014 in and around Qatif, the scene of sporadic protests by residents who complain of marginalization. — Agencies