



3 Merkel visits Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad School in Beirut



6 Erdogan, Ince trade blows on the eve of crunch polls



9 Anti-trafficking campaigners abducted and raped in India



28 Mexico beat South Korea 2-1, edge towards last 16



Saudi pledges 'measurable' oil supply boost; OPEC seals deal

OPEC deal with non-OPEC gives no specific targets

Belgium crush Tunisia 5-2



MOSCOW: Belgium's forward Eden Hazard (left) vies for the ball with Tunisia's forward Fakhreddine Ben Youssef during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group G football match between Belgium and Tunisia at the Spartak Stadium yesterday. — AFP (See Page 28)

VIENNA: OPEC agreed with Russia and other oil-producing allies yesterday to raise output from July, with Saudi Arabia pledging a "measurable" supply boost but giving no specific numbers. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries had announced an OPEC-only production agreement on Friday, also without clear output targets. Benchmark Brent oil rose by \$2.5 or 3.4 percent on the day to \$75.55 a barrel.

Yesterday, non-OPEC oil producers agreed to participate in the pact but a communique issued after their talks with the Vienna-based group provided no concrete numbers amid deep disagreements between OPEC arch-rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran. US President Donald Trump was among those wondering how much more oil OPEC would deliver. "Hope OPEC will increase output substantially. Need to keep prices down!" Trump wrote on Twitter after OPEC announced its Friday decision.

The United States, China and India had urged oil producers to release more supply to prevent an oil deficit that could undermine global economic growth. OPEC and non-OPEC said in their statement that they would raise supply by returning to 100 percent compliance with previously agreed output cuts, after months of underproduction. Saudi Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said OPEC and non-OPEC combined would pump roughly an extra 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in coming months, equal to 1 percent of global supply.

Top global exporter Saudi Arabia will increase output by hundreds of thousands of barrels, he said, with exact figures to be decided later. "We already mobilized the Aramco machinery, before coming to Vienna, pre-empting this meeting," Falih said, referring to the Saudi state oil company. Russian Energy Minister

Alexander Novak said his country would add 200,000 bpd in the second half of this year. Asked to what extent the decision to increase supply had been driven by pressure from Trump, Novak said: "It is obvious that we are not being driven by tweets but base our actions on deep market analysis."

Iran, OPEC's third-largest producer, had demanded OPEC reject calls from Trump for an increase in oil supply, arguing that he had contributed to a recent rise in prices by imposing sanctions on Iran and fellow member Venezuela. Trump slapped fresh sanctions on Tehran in May and market watchers expect Iran's output to drop by a third by the end of 2018. That means the country has little to gain from a deal to raise output, unlike Saudi Arabia.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh said the real increase could amount to as little as 500,000 bpd because Saudi Arabia would not be allowed to pump more on behalf of Venezuela, where output has collapsed in recent months. "Each country which has produced less (than its allocation) can produce more. Those which cannot, will not... This means that Saudi Arabia can increase its production by less than 100,000 bpd," Zanganeh told Argus Media. But Falih said pro-rata quota reallocations did not have to be strict, meaning Saudi wanted to fill the gaps left by others. "Some of the countries ... are not going to be able to produce, so the others will. And that implies there will be indirectly a reallocation," Falih said.

He also said OPEC could hold an extraordinary meeting before its next formal talks due on Dec 3 or adjust deliveries in September, when its monitoring committee meets, if global oil supply fell further

Continued on Page 24

News in brief

Senior Iran officer killed

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday that one of its senior officers had been killed in Syria while advising pro-government forces in an eastern town near the Iraqi border. "Brigadier General Shahrokh Daipour ... was martyred in the town of Abu Kamal in Syria during a mission to advise Syrian pro-government forces," according to the Guards' Sepah News. The brief report did not give the circumstances of the officer's death. He was described as a former unit commander who was wounded during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war before holding various positions involved with artillery. Iran, along with Russia, is a key supporter of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. — AFP

UAE backs rebel pullout

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates, whose troops have played a major role in a Yemeni government offensive against the port city of Hodeida, said yesterday that it was ready to support diplomatic efforts to secure a rebel withdrawal. But it said the pullout must be unconditional and from the whole city not just its vital docks, the entry point for three-quarters of Yemen's imports. "The coalition will achieve its goal, which is to free the city, including the port," UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, tweeted, referring to a Saudi-led coalition which intervened in support of the Yemeni government in 2015. "In the meantime, it will support all efforts to secure a peaceful and unconditional withdrawal by the rebels," he added. — AFP

45 IS jihadists killed

BAGHDAD: Iraq said yesterday it had killed 45 jihadists from the Islamic State group, including senior members, in an air strike in eastern Syria, the second such operation in less than a month. Iraqi F-16 fighter jets carried out a "successful strike targeting a meeting of Daesh (IS) leaders" on Friday in the Hajin region, in the eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzor, a military statement said. Among those killed, it said, were a senior member of the jihadists' "ministry of war", his deputy, a local commander and a media official. There was no independent confirmation. Three houses linked by an underground tunnel were also destroyed, it said, adding that the air strike was carried out based on "intelligence" and at the request of Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi. — AFP

Thousands call for 2nd Brexit vote

LONDON: Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in London yesterday calling for a second vote on Britain's departure from the European Union. The anti-Brexit campaigners marched on parliament to mark the second anniversary of the Brexit referendum, demanding a "people's vote" on whether to approve the final deal Prime Minister Theresa May strikes with the EU, if an agreement is struck at all. "I was in deep tears when the referendum happened, it looked like the future was pretty bad," said Chiara Liduori, a 40-year-old Italian living in London.

"Brexit is awful not only because we want to keep things like it is, but because it is important to be within, in order to make changes." The march, under a blue sky, set off from Pall Mall, before passing May's Downing Street office to the sound of boos and ended in Westminster, where anti-Brexit MPs including Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable and Tory rebel Anna Soubry spoke. Demonstrators held placards reading "I am a European citizen", "I Love U" and "we demand a vote on final Brexit deal." Emily Hill, 55, told AFP she was "very much in favor of letting the people" confirm they really want Brexit.

"I think lot of the voting was a protest vote, some people genuinely are not supportive of the EU, but I don't believe it is the majority opinion in this country,"

Continued on Page 24



LONDON: Demonstrators carry banners and flags as they participate in the People's March demanding a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal, in central London yesterday. — AFP

Saudi women hit the road as driving ban ends

RIYADH: Women will hit the roads in Saudi Arabia today with the lifting of the world's last ban on female drivers, long seen as an emblem of women's repression in the conservative kingdom. The move, ordered last September by King Salman, is part of sweeping reforms pushed by his powerful young son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who aims to transform the economy of the world's top oil exporter and open up its cloistered society.

"We are ready, and it will totally change our life," said Samira Al-Ghamdi, a 47-year-old psychologist from Jeddah, one of the first Saudi women to be issued with a driving license. The lifting of the ban, which for years drew international condemnation and comparisons to the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, has been welcomed by Western allies as proof of a new progressive trend in Saudi Arabia.

But it has been accompanied by a crackdown on dissent, including against some of the very activists who previously campaigned against the ban. They will sit in jail as their peers take to the road legally for the first time. Saudi women with foreign licenses only began converting them earlier this month, so the number of new drivers is expected to remain low at first. It will be some time before others learning to drive at new state-run schools are road ready. And some women still face resistance from conservative relatives. Many accus-



JEDDAH: Daniah Al-Ghalbi, a newly-licensed Saudi woman driver, sits in her car during a test-drive in the Red Sea resort of Jeddah yesterday, a day before the lifting of a ban on women driving in the conservative Arab kingdom. — AFP

tomed to using a private driver say they are reluctant to take on the Muslim kingdom's busy highways.

"I definitely won't like to drive," said Fayza Al-Shammari, a 22-year-old saleswoman. "I like to be a princess with someone opening the car door for me and driving me anywhere." Concerns that women drivers will face abuse in a country where strict segregation rules usually prevent women from interacting with unrelated men prompted a new law last month with jail and hefty fines for sexual harassment. The Interior Ministry plans to hire women traffic police for the first time, but it is unclear when they will be deployed.

The decision to lift the ban in the tightly-controlled Muslim kingdom - where once-forbidden cinemas and concerts have also returned - is expected to boost the

Continued on Page 24

Ethiopian leader escapes grenade attack at a rally

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed escaped a grenade attack yesterday at a rally in the capital that killed one person and left scores wounded, officials and witnesses said. The attack was launched by an unidentified assailant moments after 41-year-old prime minister, a former soldier who took office in April, finished his speech to tens of thousands of people gathered in the centre of Addis Ababa.

A witness saw Abiy whisked away by guards. Another witness said the assailant with the grenade had been wrestled to the ground by police before it exploded. Health Minister Amir Aman said one person was killed and 154 were wounded, with 10 of them in critical condition. Addressing the nation on television shortly after the blast and still wearing a green t-shirt he was handed at the rally, Abiy said the attack was an "attempt by forces who do not want to see Ethiopia united."

Abiy had promised the crowd in his speech in Addis Ababa's Meskel Square that he would bring more transparency to government and reconciliation to a nation of 100 million people that has been torn by protests since 2015. Eritrea, which has long been at loggerheads with Ethiopia over a border row that Abiy has sought to resolve, condemned the incident, as did the European Union and the United States.

Continued on Page 24