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EFFORTS CONTINUE IN BID TO LIFT FREEZE ON SPORTS

MP TO DEMAND PROBE IN DEPORTATION OF OPPOSITION ACTIVIST



Min 09°
Max 24°
High Tide 08:58 & 20:33
Low Tide 02:41 & 13:44

TRUCK ATTACK KILLS 4 ISRAELI SOLDIERS

JERUSALEM: A Palestinian rammed a truck into a group of Israeli soldiers visiting a popular tourist spot in Jerusalem yesterday, killing four and wounding 17 others, authorities said. The driver was also killed at the location overlooking holy sites such as the Dome of the Rock and providing one of the most spectacular views of Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleged the attacker "supported" the Islamic State group, though he provided no details on what led to the finding.

Chaos broke out at the scene when the truck ploughed through the crowd, with hundreds of soldiers having arrived there as part of a tour for troops about the history of Jerusalem. "A lone terrorist drove his truck into a group of soldiers standing on the side of the road," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told reporters at the scene. "They got off the bus, and as they were getting off the bus and getting organized, he took advantage."

After claims from some that soldiers were slow to react, Israel's military distributed a video of one of its troops saying he shot after realizing it was not an accident. "An investigation is underway but this

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JERUSALEM: The covered bodies of Israeli soldiers lie on the ground as security forces and emergency personnel gather at the site of a vehicle-ramming attack yesterday. — AFP

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Two key developments happened yesterday in continued efforts to secure a temporary lifting of international suspension on Kuwaiti sports. Head of the National Assembly's sports and youth committee MP Saadoun Hammad sent two letters to the International Olympic Committee and football's controlling body FIFA, asking them to lift the suspension on Kuwaiti sports for six months until new legislation are approved by the Assembly.

Hammad sent the letters although a number of MPs said the move will have no effect on the international sports organizations because previous similar attempts had failed. IOC, FIFA and several international sports federations suspended Kuwaiti sports from international competitions in October last year over government interference. The suspension deprived Kuwait from participating in the 2016 Rio Olympics and barred the national football team from taking part in the qualifying rounds for the 2018 World Cup in Moscow.

In his letters, Hammad said the Assembly and the government are cooperating to introduce the necessary amendments to the sports laws to become compatible with international sports charters. He appealed to both bodies to cooperate with Kuwait by lifting the suspension and promised that IOC will be invited to take part in the making of the law. Meanwhile, member of the committee and opposition MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said yesterday

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TEHRAN: In this Dec 21, 2015 file photo, former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani waves to journalists as he registers his candidacy for the elections of the Experts Assembly. — AP

FORMER IRANIAN LEADER RAFSANJANI DIES AT 82

AMIR SENDS CONDOLENCES

TEHRAN: Former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a wily political survivor and multimillionaire mogul who remained among the ruling elite despite moderate views, died yesterday, state TV reported. He was 82. Iranian media reported he suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized north of Tehran, where doctors performed CPR in vain for nearly

an hour and a half before declaring him dead. State television broke into programming to announce his death, the female newscaster's voice quivering as she read the news. She said Rafsanjani, "after a life full of restless efforts in the path of Islam and revolution, had departed for lofty heaven".

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MOROCCO CABBIES SABOTAGE UBER APP

SAUDI EMBRACE OF RIDE-HAILING APPS DRIVING CHANGE

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia hopes its plan to bring a further 1.3 million women into the workforce by 2030 will be given a lift from ride-hailing apps Uber and Dubai-based rival Careem. The cars, which the government says should only be driven by Saudi men, offer women, who are banned from driving in the conservative Muslim country, an alternative to being driven to work by chauffeurs, male relatives or the shabby taxi system. Ride-hailing apps have come under intense scrutiny from governments and regulators across the globe as they disrupt traditional taxi businesses.

But Saudi Arabia courted Uber and Careem, offering state investments, to support its Vision 2030 economic reform plan. With a budget squeezed by lower oil prices, the plan aims to draw workers away from government jobs by creating 450,000 private sector positions by 2020. Uber and Careem say they will create up to 200,000 jobs for Saudi men in the next two years. By offering women a way to get to work, it should also help meet the plan's goal of increasing the female workforce by five percentage points in the next five years to 28 percent.

"This is the next best thing to women being able to drive, because you are in control of your time, no more wasteful waiting around," said Marwa Afandi, a 36-year-old marketing executive. With the workforces of Uber and Careem easily expected to overtake the 65,000 nationals employed by state oil giant Saudi Aramco, the kingdom has invested in both companies. Saudi's sovereign wealth fund put \$3.5 billion into Uber in June 2016 while

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CASABLANCA: Moroccan taxi drivers check the Uber app as they wait for customers on Jan 6, 2017. — AFP

CASABLANCA: As their smartphone screens lit up with ride requests last month, Uber drivers in the Moroccan city of Casablanca must have thought that business was booming. Instead, they found themselves surrounded by irate local taxi drivers, who forced them from their vehicles and handed them over to the police, the latest in a string of protests in the kingdom against the controversial travel app. "After the tramway, illegal drivers and now Uber, they are trying to kill us off," said Abdelouahed, who works for a small local taxi firm.

Uber launched in Morocco's economic hub in 2015 but was banned by local authorities after just one month. It has recently found itself the target of increas-

ingly brash protests organised by owners of Casablanca's famous tomato red cabs. "When you open Uber on your phone, you see drivers swarming around you like a virus," said Nordine, a fifty-something driver sat on the hood of his taxi. "And like a virus, you need radical solutions. Trap them."

In one protest last month, dozens of taxi drivers posed as would-be passengers, flooding the app with requests before forcing the Uber drivers from their vehicles, much to the bemusement of onlookers. The management of taxis in Morocco normally falls to local government. The transport ministry has so far kept quiet as to why Uber continues to operate in the streets of Casablanca.

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IRAQ FORCES IN MOSUL PUNCH TO TIGRIS



MOSUL: An Iraqi special forces Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) member shoots at a drone flown by Islamic State militants in the Rifaq neighborhood yesterday. — AFP

ARBIL: Iraqi forces battling militants in Mosul reached the Tigris River that divides the city yesterday, a key step and a first since the launch of a huge operation in mid-October. The Islamic State group was on the back foot in Mosul after a week of significant gains for Iraqi forces but pressed a deadly campaign of bombings in Baghdad, where two more attacks killed 20 people. Elite Counter-Terrorism Forces (CTS) took control of the eastern end of the southernmost bridge in Mosul, a morale-booster in a 12-week-old operation that has encountered many difficulties.

CTS forces "reached the Tigris River from the eastern (side) of the fourth bridge," Sabah al-Noman told AFP. The news was also confirmed by Iraqi army Staff Lieutenant General Abdulamir Yarallah. Tens of thousands of Iraqi forces launched an offensive on Oct 17 to retake Mosul, the last major urban centre in Iraq

still controlled by the group that seized around a third of the country in 2014.

Several areas around the city, Iraq's second largest, were swiftly reconquered, but the elite forces that pushed into the streets of Mosul itself have faced stiffer than expected resistance. In late December, the federal advance inside the city had slowed to a crawl but a fresh coordination effort between CTS and other forces gave fresh impetus to the operation. Iraqi forces, backed by increased support from the US-led coalition that has carried out the bulk of air strikes against IS and deployed military advisers on the ground, made rapid progress in the first week of 2017.

Their push to the banks of the Tigris River yesterday marks a symbolic and tactical victory for the Iraqi forces but they have much work left to do to take full control of Mosul's eastern side.

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EGYPTIANS THROW PARTIES TO SAVE IN 'MONEY POOLS'



MINUFIYAH, Egypt: An Egyptian man blows a fireball during a wedding in this Nile Delta province on May 16, 2016. — AFP (See Page 40)