

Desert auto rally

Amul, Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan’s authoritarian leader yesterday aunched the isolated country’s first international auto rally running through the Karakum desert and tracing a spur of the Old Silk Road.

The five-stage race involving more than 80 teams representing 20 countries is set to wind up on Saturday and will serve as a qualifying tournament for a longer, two-week rally through three African countries next year.

Speaking at the rally’s opening, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov said the race from the eastern city of Amul -- a former hub on the old trade routes linking Europe and Asia -- to the western city of Hazar on the country’s Caspian coast would “bring peoples closer together.”

“We are holding the first international rally called ‘Amul-Hazar 2018,’” boomed Berdymukhamedov, who has in the past driven racing cars around for state media. “Welcome.”

Contestants will race across deserts and wild terrain spanning approximately 1,570 kilometers (975 miles).

Jean-Louis Schlesser, a French ex-Formula One driver and rally champion who is the director of the Amul-Hazar race, thanked over 150 participants including “the big names that responded.”

Russian rally raid truck driver Ayrat Mardeev and British car driver Harry Hunt are among the better-known competitors featuring in the Turkmen Desert Race.

PSG to launch cryptocurrency

Paris, France

French footballing giants Paris Saint-Germain are launching their own cryptocurrency after announcing a new partnership with Socios.com, a blockchain company based in Malta.

In a statement announcing the deal on Tuesday, Qatar-owned PSG did not reveal the length of the agreement or how much money they will make from it, although a source told AFP they expected it to be worth “several million euros”.

Socios.com describes itself as a “tokenized football fan voting platform”, with the title derived from the Spanish name given to members of La Liga giants Barcelona and Real Madrid.

PSG, who signed Brazilian superstar Neymar for a world record fee of 222 million euros (\$264m) last year, also want to “release rewards, exclusive content and all kinds of experiences” through the deal.

Socios.com founder Alexandre Dreyfus says his company’s idea is to “reinvent... in more of a 2.0 style” the concept of the “socio”, which in Spain means allowing fans to be directly involved in club decision-making.

# A ‘dream’ come true

Monaco driver Charles Leclerc will replace Finnish veteran Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari next season

AFP | Milan, Italy

Young Monaco driver Charles Leclerc will replace Finnish veteran Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari next season with the former world champion returning to Sauber where he started his career, both Formula One teams announced on Tuesday.

The 20-year-old Leclerc -- a Ferrari Driver Academy graduate -- is a rising star of the sport winning GP3 in 2016 and Formula 2 in 2017, before making his debut in F1 this season with the Sauber team.

“Scuderia Ferrari announces that, at the end of the 2018 season, Kimi Raikkonen will step down from his current role,” the team said in a statement. “.. in the next Formula One racing season, Charles Leclerc will drive for the Team alongside Sebastian Vettel,” it added.

“Dreams do come true,” Leclerc posted on Twitter. “I’ll be driving for @scuderiaferrari for the 2019 Formula 1 World Championship.”

Leclerc has had a promising start to his rookie season, finishing sixth at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix, with 16 points from 14 races.

He has been nurtured by the Scuderia Ferrari for several years and is managed by Nicolas Todt, son of former Ferrari team principal and current FIA president Jean Todt.

“I will be eternally grateful to @scuderiaferrari for the opportunity given. To @nicolastodt for supporting me since 2011. To my family,” Leclerc added.

Leclerc also paid tribute to former French driver Jules Bianchi, who died aged 25 in 2015 from injuries he sustained at the Japanese Grand Prix.

“To Jules, thank you for all the things you learnt me, we will never forget you,” he added of Bianchi whom he knew from his karting days in south-east France.

The 38-year-old Raikkonen has entered 287 Grands Prix --- 144 for Ferrari -- winning 20 since his debut in 2001 with Sauber.

The Finn -- known as the “Iceman” -- achieved his 100th podium finish by finishing second at the Italian Grand Prix in Monza this month after claiming his 18th pole in style with F1’s all-time fastest lap.

This season he has had nine podium finishes and is third overall, 92 points behind Lewis Hamilton.

“During these years, Kimi’s contribu-



Charles Leclerc

tion to the team, both as a driver and on account of his human qualities, has been fundamental. He played a decisive role in the team’s growth and was, at the same time, always a great team player,” Team Principal Maurizio Arrivabene said.

Raikkonen left F1 two years after winning the world title with Ferrari and spent two years competing in the World Rally Championship, before returning to F1 with Lotus in 2012.

Raikkonen returns to F1 roots

Raikkonen moved back to Ferrari in

2014, and was a popular figure with over 87,000 fans signing a petition this week to keep him at the Maranello-based team.

“As a World Champion for Scuderia Ferrari, he will always be part of the Team’s history and family. We thank Kimi for all of this and wish him and his family a prosperous future,” the team added.

Sauber later confirmed Raikkonen would return to the team he made his debut with in 2001.

“The Alfa Romeo Sauber F1 Team is delighted to announce that Kimi Räik-

Factfile on Charles Leclerc

Name	:	Charles Leclerc
Date of birth	:	October 16, 1997
Place of birth	:	Monaco
Nationality	:	Monégasque
Height	:	1.80m
Team	:	2018: Sauber
Race number	:	16
Formula One career	:	
Grand Prix started	:	14
Teams (2018), Ferrari (from 2019)	:	Sauber
Debut	:	Australia
2018	:	
Points	:	13
Best result	:	6th in Azerbaijan
2017 champion	:	Formula Two
2016 champion	:	GP3

könen will join the team from 2019. The 2007 Formula One World Champion has signed for the next two seasons,” Sauber confirmed.

Raikkonen left Sauber for McLaren in 2002 before rejoining Ferrari in 2006.

He tweeted: “Guess who’s back?! Next two years with @sauberf1team ahead! Feels extremely good to go back where it all began!”

Sauber team principal Frédéric Vasseur said: “Signing Kimi Räikkönen as our driver represents an important pillar of our project, and brings us closer to our target of making significant progress as a team in the near future.

“Kimi’s undoubted talent and immense experience in Formula One will not only contribute to the development of our car, but will also accelerate the growth and development of our team as a whole.

“Together, we will start the 2019 season with a strong foundation, driven by the determination to fight for results that count.”

Vasseur added: “It has been a great pleasure to support Charles Leclerc in his rookie year in Formula One. Since his arrival, he has given the team great motivation.”

## Fenati loses licence after pulling rival’s brake

AFP | Milan, Italy

Disgraced Moto2 rider Romano Fenati has lost his licence and been banned from competing in all events by the Italian motorcycling federation for grabbing a rival’s brake during the San Marino Grand Prix.

The 22-year-old Fenati had earlier announced he was retiring after being sacked by his Marinelli Snipers team and the Forward Racing team he was due to join next season.

Fenati has also been ordered to appear before a disciplinary hearing of the Italian federation on September 14 to present his version of events.

Both riders were speeding around the Misano track at over 200kph on Sunday when Fenati -- aboard a Marinelli Snipers-run Kalex bike -- leaned over and pressed fellow Italian Stefano Manzi’s brake lever. Manzi briefly lost his balance before regaining control of his Suter bike.



Fenati has been banned for grabbing a rival’s brake during the San Marino Grand Prix.

Fenati’s actions followed Manzi’s attempt to overtake him a few laps earlier, with both riders running off the track.

The Italian apologised for his “disgraceful gesture” and said Tuesday he was retiring from sport and going back to complete his studies.

“I’m finished with the motorcycle world, I will not run again. I was wrong, it’s true: I apologise to everyone,” Fenati told Italian newspaper La Repubblica.

But he added: “Do you want to see my helmet and my leathers? There is a long black strip, the Manzi rubber. He attacked me three times and he could have killed me too, as you say.

“The last time I had it done to me was 500m before (the brake incident), then I thought ‘now I do the same, I’ll show you that I can be bad’ and maybe you will finally understand what it means.

“But I never thought to hurt him, I swear.”