

International

CBS titan Leslie Moonves accused of sexual misconduct

CBS investigates recently reported alleged misconduct

NEW YORK: A bombshell article published in The New Yorker on Friday accused CBS chairman and chief executive, Leslie Moonves, of sexual misconduct stretching back decades and painted a broader picture of similar behavior within the most watched US television network. The article makes Moonves, a distinguished executive who transformed CBS into a ratings winner, one of the most powerful American men implicated in the #MeToo era that ignited last year after the career implosion of Harvey Weinstein.

CBS announced that it had launched an investigation into the "recently reported" alleged misconduct. Reports about the story sent CBS shares tumbling more than six percent, hours before it was even published. Six women who had professional dealings with Moonves told the magazine that he sexually harassed them between the 1980s and late 2000s. Moonves, 68, joined CBS in 1995 from Warner Bros. Television, where his team developed hit shows such as "Friends" and "ER."

Four described forcible touching or kissing during business meetings, and two said Moonves physically intimidated them or threatened to derail their careers. The New Yorker's Ronan Farrow reported. "I recog-

nize that there were times decades ago when I may have made some women uncomfortable by making advances. Those were mistakes, and I regret them immensely," Moonves said in a statement obtained by AFP. "But I always understood and respected—and abided by the principle—that 'no' means 'no,' and I have never misused my position to harm or hinder anyone's career," he added.

“ I may have made some women uncomfortable ”

Appropriate action

The New Yorker said 30 current or former employees complained that such behavior extended from Moonves to other parts of the corporation, including CBS News and its flagship investigative program "60 Minutes." But his wife, Julie Chen,

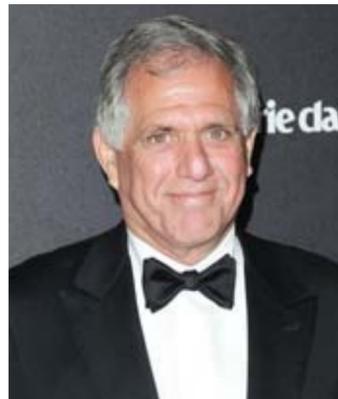
whom he married in 2004 and who is the host of "Big Brother" on CBS, said she fully supported her husband. "Leslie is a good man and a loving father, devoted husband and inspiring corporate leader. He has always been a kind, decent and moral human being," she said on Twitter.

Men at CBS News accused of sexual misconduct were promoted, even as the company paid settlements to women with complaints. The New Yorker also reported, suggesting a wider toxic environment at the network. In a statement sent to AFP, CBS suggested the article did not accurately reflect a company that "does its best to treat its tens of thousands of employees with dignity and respect."

The corporation's board of directors had earlier issued a pre-emptive statement, saying that upon conclusion of its investigation, it would "promptly review the findings and take appropriate action." In November, CBS News sacked Charlie Rose, at the time one of the most respected TV journalists in the United States, after eight women told The Washington Post he had made unwanted sexual advances.

Legal battle

Farrow shared a Pulitzer Prize with The



CALIFORNIA: In this file photo Leslie Moonves attends the TWC/NETFLIX Golden Globe after party, in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

New York Times for his reporting on Weinstein, which galvanized the #MeToo movement to quash pervasive sexual harassment in showbiz and other industries. The son of actress Mia Farrow and film director Woody Allen said Friday his latest

article was the product of an eight-month investigation. In May, he uncovered allegations of physical assault that forced New York state prosecutor Eric Schneiderman to resign.

Farrow's latest expose raised speculation that Moonves might also be forced to step aside. Nor was it clear what impact it would have on a legal battle for control of the US television giant—between the Redstone family, which controls CBS, and the board, chaired by Moonves. Shari Redstone is a major shareholder of both CBS and Viacom, and is seeking to merge the two companies. Moonves opposes the deal.

As chairman, Moonves oversees all operations of the company, which include the CBS Television Network, premium cable service Showtime, and the Simon & Schuster publishing company. He has launched primetime CBS hits such as "Everybody Loves Raymond," "Survivor" and "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation." He was promoted to president and CEO of CBS Television in 1998, and became chairman in 2003. A one-time actor, he is father to four children. Chen is his second wife. Last year, CBS was the most watched network in the United States, although it dropped into third place, behind NBC and Fox for adults aged 18-49. — AFP

Greece to start burying wildfire victims, govt faces criticism

ATHENS: Greece will this weekend begin burying the victims of a devastating wildfire near Athens which killed at least 88 people, and has prompted criticism of the government's handling of the disaster. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on Friday took political responsibility for the tragedy as opposition leaders said the government had failed to adequately safeguard lives.

Today, three members of the same family are due to be laid to rest in the first known funeral since the blaze broke out last Monday in the seaside village of Mati, 30 km east of Athens. "We will say our final goodbye to our much-loved Grigoris, Evita and Andreas ... tragic victims in Mati," the Fytrou family said in a statement published by the Athens news agency, asking media not to attend. The search for the missing continues and many people remain in hospital, while the names of more victims have emerged.

Twin nine-year old girls Sofia and Vasiliki Filippopoulou, whose pictures have featured internationally, were confirmed dead, state broadcaster ERT reported yesterday. DNA tests showed the girls and their grandparents



ATHENS: The wreckage of a burnt car is pictured on the sea side of the village of Mati, near Athens. — AFP

died in the blaze at Mati. Their grandfather's burnt-out car was located outside a plot of land where 26 people died, with some of the victims found embracing each other in death, ERT said. Heavy downpours hit the region on Saturday, prompting fears that the work of rescue crews and efforts by locals to salvage what they can from the fire could be made more difficult.

The government has announced a long list of relief measures and promised to tackle decades-old problems, including haphazard and unlicensed residential building, to minimize the risk of a repeat disaster and to cool public anger. A deputy mayor in Marathon, which administers some of the affected area, yesterday became the first official to resign over the wildfire. — Reuters

Thousands of Russians protest against pension age hike

MOSCOW: Tens of thousands of Russians took part yesterday in rallies across the country organized by Communists to protest against highly controversial plans to hike the pension age. In Moscow, organizers said up to 100,000 people gathered for a permitted rally against the government-backed reform, which is currently going through parliament. However, reporters put the turnout much lower at around 10,000.

Protests took place in dozens of cities and towns in far eastern Russia, Siberia and western Russia. Around 1,200 people protested in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, TASS state news agency reported, citing city hall. Demonstrators in Moscow chanted "Pension-off Putin!" and carried banners with slogans including "We want to live on our pensions and not die at work." In Russia's second largest city of Saint Petersburg, around 1,000 people took part in a Communist rally, with some waving red flags and holding portraits of Stalin.

The rare show of public opposition to a reform backed by President Vladimir Putin's ruling party has seen 2.9 million sign a protest petition and the often compliant Communist Party vote against it. Putin, who did not mention the issue ahead of his re-election in March and had previously vowed not to raise the pension age, has seen public trust in his presidency fall to 64 percent this month, down from 80 percent in May, according to



MOSCOW: Communist party supporters along with activists of the country's left-wing movements rally against the government's proposed reform hiking the pension age in Moscow. — AFP

VTSIOM state pollster.

"Many believed Putin when he said there would be no pension reform. It turns out that was demagoguery. I'm very disappointed in him," protester Irina Ivanova, 49, told AFP in Saint Petersburg. The draft law calls for the pension age to be gradually raised to 63 for women and 65 for men, up from the current Soviet-era norms of 55 for women and 60 for men.

'How will we live?'

Putin last week said he disliked the idea of raising the pension age but that doing nothing was not an option, insisting "we will have to take some crucial decisions." "Tens of thousands have gathered here to say no to this pension reform," Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov told the Moscow rally. "This is a blow to every citizen in our country." Those who oppose the reform argue that many Russians, particularly men, will not live

to enjoy their pensions.

Currently, Russian men on average die in their early 60s, Zyuganov said, and "they will all get their pension in their coffins". In addition, many Russians say that employers are reluctant to hire older people. "How will we live? I don't know. They don't hire anyone over 50," said 59-year-old Galina Nikiforova in Saint Petersburg. The speaker of the lower house of parliament, representing Putin's United Russia ruling party, said Friday that such protests were pointless.

"You can't resolve these questions at demonstrations," Vyacheslav Volodin told the Communist faction in parliament. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny has called on his supporters to attend an authorized rally against the pension reforms in Moscow on Sunday afternoon, organized by the little-known Libertarian Party. "We all understand perfectly: the only real aim of this 'reform' is to rob the public," he wrote on his blog. —AFP

Catalan ex-leader vows to press on with independence bid

BRUSSELS: Catalonia's deposed president Carles Puigdemont vowed yesterday to "defend the just cause of the Catalan people" as he returned to Belgium. Four months after he was detained in Germany at Madrid's request, Puigdemont was able to travel to Belgium after a Spanish court dropped a European arrest warrant for him. "This is not the end of my journey. I will travel to the last corner of our continent to defend the just cause of the Catalan people," he said at the offices of Catalonia's delegation in Brussels.

He was joined at the news conference by his designated successor Quim Torra, who still considers him the "legitimate president" of Catalonia. Puigdemont was to travel south of the Belgian capital later Saturday to the town of Waterloo, known for another battle-French emperor Napoleon's defeat by a mix of European forces in 1815 — for a ceremony. The 55-year-old former regional leader intends to set up a "Republican council" at his Waterloo base to continue to fight for Catalan independence, as well as an assembly composed of local officials to work in parallel with the Catalan government.

"My political activity will be based in

Belgium, of course with the aim of pursuing the mandate by the people" for an independent Catalonia. Puigdemont said in Berlin when he announced his return this week. Sacked as Catalan president after a failed secession bid on October 27, Puigdemont and several members of his executive fled to Brussels several days later. He was then arrested in Germany at the end of March on his return from a trip to Finland.

Arrest warrant dropped

Puigdemont was freed on bail and a German court ruled that he could be extradited only on possible corruption charges and not for "rebellion" as sought by Madrid. Following that decision, Spain's Supreme Court judge Pablo Llerena, in charge of the case against separatist leaders, dropped the international arrest warrant. From Belgium, Puigdemont will be able to travel where he likes, except to Spain where he is still wanted for rebellion, which carries up to 25 years in jail, and for misuse of public funds.

In theory, he could remain in self-exile for 20 years, which in Spain's legal system is the time limit after which the rebellion charge would no longer be valid. Although power is now officially in Torra's hands, Puigdemont continues to exert strong influence in the region. "In Brussels, we will continue... to develop activities linked to that which the people of Catalonia approved on October 1," Puigdemont said in Germany, in reference to the referendum banned by Spain's courts and marred by police violence. Five other leading members of the pro-independence movement are in Belgium, Switzerland and Scotland. —AFP

Ukrainian president slams Russian church

KIEV: Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko yesterday condemned the influential Russian Orthodox Church, which counts millions of believers, as a threat to national security. The influence of the Russian Orthodox Church is a "direct threat to the national security of Ukraine", Poroshenko said during ceremonies marking 1,030 years since conversion to Christianity, adding that "this obliges us to act".

The Orthodox Church in Ukraine is split between the largest branch whose clerics pledge loyalty to the head of the Russian church, Patriarch Kirill, and one that is overseen by Kiev-based Patriarch Filaret. Poroshenko joined a procession of tens of thousands of believers organized by the Kiev church after the Moscow-based church held a similar procession on Friday. "I believe it is absolutely necessary to cut off all the tentacles with which the aggressor country operates inside the body of our state," Poroshenko said of the

Russian church. He complained that it is "separated from the state only on paper" while in reality it "fully and unconditionally supports the Kremlin's revanchist imperial policy." In Moscow on Saturday, President Vladimir Putin headed a procession of worshippers with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, underlining their close relations. Kirill even drew attention to the fact that Putin shares a first name with Prince Vladimir, who brought Christianity to the pagan Slavic state of Kievan Rus in 988.

"I think there is no such thing as a coincidence, especially when we are talking about people whose actions truly change the world," the Patriarch told Putin. He prayed for peace among those fighting in the conflict between Kiev's forces and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. The conflict has exacerbated tensions between the two churches, with Ukrainian Patriarch Filaret once saying Putin was "possessed by Satan".

The Kiev-based church supported the bloody popular uprising in 2014 that ousted a Kremlin-backed government in Ukraine. Kirill on Friday warned against attempts to drive a wedge between the two churches. "Attempts to artificially tear the Ukrainian Orthodox Church away from the Moscow Patriarchate can lead to a catastrophe," he said. —AFP