



The pack rides during the 3rd stage of the 101st Giro d'Italia (Tour of Italy) yesterday, 229 km between Beer-Sheva and Eilat. — AFP

Stormy Daniels taunts fake Trump

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where he effectively stood there and lied to the American people" about it, Avenatti told ABC's "This Week." Giuliani said on "This Week" that he had no knowledge of other similar payments by Cohen, but that the attorney could have made them "if it was necessary". Avenatti jumped on Giuliani's remarks. "The president had effectively an extramarital affair slush fund that was administered by Michael Cohen, and that he would just be expected to take care of these things; they were a regular occurrence," Avenatti said. "That, in and of itself, should be very disturbing."

In the SNL skit, Trump rattled off what he called a series of achievements as president, including progress on the Korean nuclear crisis. Why can't he resolve things with



Stormy Daniels



Donald Trump

Daniels, too, he asked. "Sorry, Donald. It's too late for that. I know you don't believe in climate change. But a storm's a comin', baby," she said. — AFP

Iran: US will regret quitting...

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of any limits on Iran's conventional missile capabilities and Tehran's role in the region. Iran's support for Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, via the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah in Syria's civil war, and its backing for Shiite Huthi rebels in Yemen have added to frictions between Tehran and Western powers.

Rouhani vehemently reiterated his country's opposition to curtailing its non-nuclear missile capabilities, in his speech yesterday. Tehran "will build as many missiles and weapons as needed" for its defense, he said. "We are honoring our commitment, but we are telling the whole world we will not negotiate with anyone about our weapons and our defense."

Iran's president also said that while he is open to

discussing the country's regional role, he would not abandon what he described as its fight "against terrorism". "We want to talk to the world so that our region is safe" but "we will not allow you to create a new Daesh" he said, using an Arabic term for the Islamic State group. While Rouhani did not elaborate on this point, Iran's ally the Syrian government has consistently referred to all armed opponents as "terrorists" and accused the West of facilitating terrorism.

Iran has always denied it sought a nuclear weapon, insisting its atomic program was for civilian purposes. Rouhani did not specify how Iran would react if the US pulls out of the 2015 deal. But he said he had given "the necessary orders", notably to Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, in anticipation of Trump's decision. As the May 12 US decision point nears, Iranian leaders have shuffled between placatory and hawkish comments, although the hardliners have taken an uncompromising stance. On Thursday, Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign policy adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned Tehran would quit the nuclear deal if the United States withdraws. — AFP

Lebanese vote in first election...

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Lebanon has often been a scene where the rivalry between the region's two heavyweight has played out but their political clients in this election seemed content to maintain the status quo. With the turnout figure on course to fall short of the 54 percent mark set in 2009, several senior political leaders to made televised appeals for an eleventh-hour rush to the ballot boxes. "No one should underestimate the importance of their vote or think that heading down to the ballot box is too much to ask," said Ahmad Hariri, the secretary-general of the premier's Future Movement.

No polling extension was decided but in some areas, large numbers of people already queuing when the clock struck 7:00 pm (1600 GMT) were still voting. In other polling stations, the counting was already under way. More than 3.7 million Lebanese are eligible to vote, and will choose from 597 candidates who are running on 77 closed lists for a seat in the 128-strong parliament. President Michel Aoun's position is not up for renewal but his Christian party is a key player in the vote, for which a reformed, more proportional electoral law is in force.

"The low turnout as of midday is without a doubt an indicator of the disillusionment among Lebanese," political analyst Karim Mufti said. Experts differed on who would benefit the most from a low turnout as sce-

narios vary across the country's 15 districts, whose size and sectarian fabric are all different. The new, pre-printed ballots used yesterday perplexed some voters, causing delays in polling stations.

Other voters explained that they refused to endorse their usual candidate because of an unsavory alliance on a list that the new voting system no longer allows them to modify. Many first-time voters in Beirut seemed keen to see new faces in parliament and voted for a civil society movement that has sought to compensate its lack of patronage networks and financial firepower with a dynamic social media campaign. "It's the first time I vote," Therese, 60, told AFP outside a voting center in central Beirut. "I've come to support civil society because there's nobody else I like in this country, but I doubt they will win," she said.

The diagram of alliances across Lebanon's gerrymandered constituency map is an almost comical spaghetti jumble of local deals between parties working together in one district and competing in the next. That has fuelled already deep disillusionment in a country where the same dynasties have held political power for decades and are widely seen as self-serving and corrupt.

Results, which were due to start coming in during the night, will be closely watched but analysts say that there is little room for surprises and that uneasy, sometimes fluctuating alliances between the main parties would remain the rule. Scuffles broke out around several polling stations across the country and monitors reported a number of mostly minor incidents and violations but the European Union's observation mission said its assessment was positive. — AFP

Tunisia votes in first free...

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Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, but municipal polls had been delayed four times due to logistic, administrative and political deadlocks.

President Beji Caid Essebsi has called for a "massive turnout". "For the first time (since the revolution) the Tunisian people are called to participate in municipal elections, something that seems simple but it is very important," he said on Friday. Casting his ballot on Sunday, Essebsi again urged Tunisians to vote, saying "democracy cannot be imposed but must be exercised". Rached Ghannouchi, head of the Islamist Ennahdha movement, also urged a large turnout by "young Tunisian voters", admitting however that politicians "don't hold all the keys to progress".

Tunisia is grappling with economic challenges including an inflation rate which stands at around eight percent and an unemployment rate of more than 15 percent. The country was hit by a wave of protest at the start of the year over a new austerity budget introduced by the government. "These municipal elections won't change anything for us. We will always be on the same cart without wheels or a horse," 34-year-old housewife Hilma told AFP ahead of the vote.

More than 57,000 candidates, half of them women and young people, are running for office in Tunisia's 350 municipalities. Around 60,000 police and military personnel have been mobilised for the polls, while Tunisia remains under a state of emergency, imposed in 2015 after a string of deadly jihadist attacks. European parliament vice president Fabio Castaldo, head of an EU delegation monitoring the polls, said the election was "an important step for the country's stability".

Voting ran until 6:00 pm (1700 GMT) in more than 11,000 polling stations across the country. But in Sidi Bouzid, cradle of the 2011 revolution, and the neighboring region of Kasserine in central Tunisia, a hotbed of protests during the revolt, polling stations opened later and closed earlier for "security reasons", organizers said.

In December 2010, street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and later died of his wounds in Sidi Bouzid, in a protest over unemployment and police harassment that sparked the Arab Spring. The municipal elections, enshrined in the new constitution and one of the demands of the revolution, mark the first tangible step of decentralization since the end of Ben Ali's rule. Voters will elect municipal counselors who in turn will elect mayors by mid-June.

Experts predict Tunisia's two political heavyweights - Ennahdha movement and the secular Nidaa Tounes party founded by Essebsi - will come out on top in nearly every district. But there remains some hope that the polls will see a new generation elected into office. The municipal polls will be followed by legislative and presidential votes in 2019. — AFP

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