

## FRANCE'S MACRON IN NEW STEP TOWARDS PRESIDENTIAL BID?

PARIS: France's rising political star Emmanuel Macron addressed a meeting of his political movement yesterday in what is widely seen as the latest step towards a bid for the presidency.

The 38-year-old economy minister set up "En Marche" (On the move) in April to the consternation of many of his Socialist Party colleagues. They saw it as a challenge to the authority of embattled President Francois Hollande. The timing of his speech on yesterday, two days before Hollande gives his traditional Bastille Day TV interview, has also raised some eyebrows.

Macron's allies say though that no-one should expect him to announce yet that he is either leaving the government or that he will be a candidate for president. "He is not going to say 'I'm leaving straight away' but he is 'entering campaign mode'," said one of Macron's main supporters, the mayor of Lyon, Gerard Collomb.

Some say he could launch his real campaign in September, France's traditional back-to-work month after the summer holidays. Macron hinted again at the weekend that he had ambitions to stand in next May's election. Invited to watch a stage of the Tour de France, he made a series of references comparing cycling with politics, saying he was in the race to challenge for the "yellow jersey" worn by the leader.

"There are several stages. One began on April 6 (with the creation of En Marche) and I hope to see it through to the summit," he added in a reference to the mountainous stage of the race.

The problem for the Socialists is that while Macron refuses to rule out a bid for France's highest

office, Hollande's abysmal poll ratings make it hard for him to appear the natural candidate of the left 10 months from now.

In an apparent jibe at Hollande, Macron said this month the possibility of primaries being held to decide the candidates of both the Socialists and the centre-right Republicans was "proof of the weak leadership on both sides". Hollande has said he will decide by the end of the year whether he will stand, even though opinion polls currently show he would be eliminated in the first round.

## 'Question of loyalty'

The president and the government appear to have weathered the storm of weeks of strikes and protests over their attempts to reform France's rigid labor laws to make it easier to hire and fire employees and bring down the high unemployment that has dogged Hollande for four years.

France's successful staging of the European football championship also gave Hollande some relief from his critics, even if the host nation lost to Portugal in the final on Sunday.

Hollande's response to Macron's setting up of the party in April was clear he "has to be in my team, under my authority", he said. "It's a question of personal and political loyalty," the president added.

Applauded by liberals for challenging the key planks of French Socialism such as the 35-hour work week, Macron has been lampooned by die-hard leftists as being too cozy with big business.

He earned nearly one million Euros (\$1.1 million) a year as a Rothschild banker before entering politics



PARIS: French Minister of Economy Emmanuel Macron (L) and Head of the French Employers Federation Medef Pierre Gattaz (R) wait for the arrival of South African President Jacob Zuma prior to an economic meeting as part of the visit of South African President Jacob Zuma on Monday. — AFP

as an advisor to Hollande, who named him to the cabinet in August 2014. France is also fascinated by Macron's marriage to his wife Brigitte, 20 years his

senior, whom he met when she was teaching at his high school. She plays a prominent role in the running of his office. — AFP

## WHAT TO EXPECT AS MAY STARTS UNTANGLING THE UK FROM THE EU SET TO BE PRIME MINISTER TODAY

LONDON: Home Secretary Theresa May is set to become Britain's new prime minister today when David Cameron steps down after six years at 10 Downing Street because of his defeat in the country's referendum on European Union membership. May will be in charge of implementing the voters' June 23 decision to leave the EU and strike an independent path. Here are answers to some questions about what happens next:

## When will the new prime minister start the legal process to leave the 28-nation EU?

To start the process of a British exit from the EU, or Brexit, a prime minister must invoke Article 50 of the EU treaty. May has said she will not start the process until next year, but she may face strong pressure to accelerate the plan. She is becoming prime minister earlier than anticipated because her opponent withdrew from the Conservative Party leadership contest, and some leaders of the campaign to leave the EU want the legal process to begin right away. EU leaders are also pressing for faster action. May has said there is no rush and that she wants Britain to establish its negotiating priorities before starting the Article 50 process, which imposes a two-year deadline on negotiations. May did not back the campaign to leave the EU, expressing a preference to remain part of the bloc, but she now emphasizes that "Brexit means Brexit" and says the voters' wishes will be respected.

## Will she be able to change her mind about Brexit if the political and economic climate shifts?

Article 50 is designed to be irreversible once it is invoked, in large part to discourage countries from threatening to leave in an attempt to negotiate more favorable terms. However, no major country has ever left the bloc before so it is not entirely clear if some way could be found to keep Britain from leaving even after the process has started if that's what British and EU leaders want. The EU has been known for its ability to improvise, or fudge, solutions as needed, and if faced with economic turmoil it's possible the union could find a way to remain intact.

## Is May planning to handle the Brexit process herself?

May has said she will appoint a Cabinet-level Brexit minister along with a Brexit department to spearhead the negotiations with other European nations. It is not clear who that person will be. The process will not be simple: Thousands of treaties and



LONDON: Britain's Home Secretary Theresa May gestures as she leaves after attending a cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street yesterday. — AP

agreements are in place and will have to be unraveled. Britain will also be seeking new trade arrangements with its former union partners. Many aspects of Britain's economic and judicial systems have been intertwined with the EU for several decades and ties will now have to be severed. Just separating Britain from the EU bureaucracy will require a whole new bureaucracy to be established to manage the process. But May's political future depends on a successful divorce agreement and she may choose to become directly involved, particularly in delicate talks with other European leaders.

## Will May keep Britain in the single European economic market even after it leaves the EU?

This is one of the great unknowns. May has indicated she wants British firms to keep having unfettered access to lucrative European markets, but has insisted Britain can no longer accept the freedom of movement that has allowed EU nationals to move to Britain without any restrictions. European leaders guided by EU principles may be unwilling to give Britain access to European markets without accepting the free movement of people. Cameron was

unable to win meaningful compromises on this point during his tenure, and it is not clear if May will fare any better. This is really the heart of the matter, with much riding - for both sides - on finding some common ground.

## May is coming to power without having been elected and the opposition is calling for an early general election. If one is held, how would it affect May's plans for Brexit?

The next scheduled general election is set to be held in 2020, but Parliament has the power to schedule an earlier vote. May said when she launched her leadership bid in June that she did not see a need for an early election. Once she is in power, it is possible she may ask Parliament to hold an early election if she feels a new election would add to the Conservative Party's slim majority in Parliament. If an election is held, and if a candidate who strongly favors EU membership would be elected with a clear mandate from the public to keep Britain inside the bloc, it could have a substantial impact on the Brexit plan. But May is unlikely to risk an early election unless she is extremely confident of victory. — AP

## ISLAMIST ATTACKS, MIGRANT CRISIS MAKE GERMANS ANXIOUS

BERLIN: Germans have become far more fearful in the last year, with a possible terrorist attack, political extremism and the social effects of Europe's migrant crisis topping their list of worries, a survey showed yesterday.

Just over a year before a federal election in Europe's biggest economy, the annual study by insurer R-V showed a 10 percentage point increase in its annual "fear index" of Germans to 49 percent. "Never before in the course of our surveys have peoples' fears risen so drastically within a year as in 2016," said Brigitte Roemstedt, head of the R-V Info Centre which conducted the survey of 2,400 Germans.

Deadly Islamist attacks hitting neighboring France and Belgium have put Germany on high alert. In addition, more than one million migrants have entered the country, many from war-torn countries like Syria and Iraq, fuelling concern about mounting costs and integration. "Terror attacks, riots by extremists but also political polarization following uncon-

trolled mass migration are shaking Germans' characteristic need for security," said political scientist Manfred Schmidt of the Ruprecht-Karls University in Heidelberg who was a consultant for the survey.

The top concern, terrorism, worried 73 percent of Germans compared to 52 percent last year. Second comes political extremism which causes anxiety among 68 percent of Germans, up from about half last year. Higher than ever before is the fear that migration could cause tensions between Germans and foreigners living in the country. With an 18 percent jump, 67 percent were worried about that.

Political parties are likely to compete in offering solutions to these issues in the run-up to the 2017 election. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives and their coalition partner, the centre-left Social Democrats, have in the last year lost support to the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD). — Reuters

## AUSTRIA SEIZING HITLER'S BIRTHPLACE TO PREVENT NAZI PILGRIMAGE SITE

VIENNA: Austria's government moved yesterday to seize the house where Adolf Hitler was born to prevent it becoming a site of pilgrimage for neo-Nazis, and the country's Interior Minister said he wanted to tear it down.

Hitler's family lived in the house in Braunau on the Inn for only three years around his birth on April 20, 1889; but the fate of the three-storey building coated in pale yellow paint has long been the subject of controversy. A spokesman for the interior ministry said the government had agreed a law to take ownership after the building's landlord, a local woman, had refused to sell it to the state. The bill would now go before parliament.

"The decision is necessary because the Republic would like to prevent this house from becoming a 'cult site' for neo-Nazis in any way, which it has been repeatedly in the past, when people gathered there to shout slogans," Interior Minister Wolfgang Sobotka told reporters before the cabinet meeting.

"It is my vision to tear down the house," he added. A commission consisting of 12 members from the fields of politics, adminis-

tration, academia and civic society will ultimately decide the fate of the building.

A retired local woman owns the property, which Austria's interior ministry has been renting since 1972 and has sublet to Braunau. The ministry pays around 4,800 Euros (\$5,332) a month in rent.

The building has housed workshops for disabled people, but has been empty since 2011, because the owner repeatedly rejected ideas for the future use of the house and purchase offers from the state, according to the interior ministry spokesman.

Once the law has passed parliament, the owner has no right to appeal the decision or negotiate her compensation, which will be in line with the sum paid to home owners evicted in the course of railway line construction, he said.

Nazi Germany annexed Austria in 1938. Debate still smolders over whether Austrians were willing accomplices, many having cheered his return to his country of birth at the time, or the first victims of a dictatorship that ultimately reduced much of Europe to ruins and cost tens of millions of lives. — Reuters



KENYA: Malala Yousafzai speaks to refugees in the Dadaab refugee camp yesterday. —

## NOBEL WINNER MALALA VISITS WORLD'S LARGEST REFUGEE CAMP

DADAAB, KENYA: Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai was spending her 19th birthday yesterday visiting the world's largest refugee camp to draw attention to the global refugee crisis, especially as Dadaab camp faces pressure to close after a quarter-century.

Since last year, Malala has been in contact via Skype with a group of girls in Dadaab and was looking forward to meeting them and others, said Taylor Royle, her spokesman. "I am here to speak for my unheard sisters of Somalia striving for education every day," Malala said yesterday, explaining that on each birthday she chooses a region where girls' education is neglected and needs attention.

Kenya's government says Dadaab camp, which hosts more than 300,000 mostly Somali refugees, will be closed in the next

year because it has become a security liability. The camp is in eastern Kenya, near its border with Somalia.

The possibility that the camp will be closed brings yet more uncertainty to the refugees, who face the prospect of returning to a Somalia still plagued with conflict. Kenya insists any returns will be voluntary, even as the international community has urged caution and warned against forceful evictions.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta has said repatriations from Dadaab will be done in a humane way. Many of Dadaab's refugees have lived most if not all their lives in the sprawling camp, which has been open for 25 years and is a vast settlement of established homes and newcomers' improvised huts of thorn branches and other materials. — AP

## UK LABOR PARTY AWAITS KEY LEADERSHIP RULING, CORBYN'S FATE IN BALANCE

LONDON: The socialist head of Britain's opposition Labor Party, Jeremy Corbyn, will discover whether he has the automatic right to defend himself from a leadership challenge - a key moment in the running battle for control of the party.

The turmoil within the 116-year-old party, which governed Britain for 13 years until 2010 under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, comes as the country's political landscape is changing fast following a June 23 vote to leave the European Union.

While the ruling Conservative Party has quickly appointed a new leader, Theresa May, to take over from Prime Minister David Cameron and pilot the "Brexit" process, Labor's left-wing leadership is locked in a bitter internal power struggle with its more moderate members of parliament (MPs).

As Labor looks to define its priorities for the upcoming negotiations, rival MP Angela Eagle has triggered a leadership contest, saying Corbyn has failed to connect with voters and is not capable of winning a national election.

Corbyn has said he will not resign, citing the overwhelming mandate he won from the party's grassroots members when they elected him leader in September last year. That has sparked fears that the party could split, as it did in the 1980s, and dilute the centre-left influence over Brexit negotiations.

The party's internal strife has fuelled tensions among its supporters, and police said on yesterday Eagle's constituency office in northern England had been vandalized. Corbyn said he and other lawmakers had received death threats. "It is extremely concerning that Angela

Eagle has been the victim of a threatening act and that other MPs are receiving abuse and threats," he said in a statement.

Later on Tuesday, the party's National Executive Committee will make a crucial ruling over whether Corbyn's name can automatically go onto the ballot paper for the leadership election or whether he, like his challenger, needs to find 51 lawmakers to back him.

"It would be alien to the concept of natural justice that Jeremy Corbyn is not automatically on the ballot paper," said Len McCluskey, a Corbyn supporter and head of Unite, the

country's biggest union and Labor's largest financial backer.

"What I won't accept is any sordid little fix which is alien to our traditions." If the ruling goes against Corbyn he could struggle to find enough lawmakers to support his bid, given that Labor MPs have already passed a motion of no-confidence in him by a margin of 172 to 40.

Corbyn retains strong support among the party's rank-and-file members, meaning that if he does make the ballot paper he could hold on to power and prolong the stand-off with MPs. — Reuters

## POLISH GOVT WANTS TO REDUCE COMMUNIST AGENT PENSIONS

WARSAW: Poland announced yesterday a plan to shrink the pensions cheques received by tens of thousands of ex-agents in the nation's feared communist-era secret police out of a "sense of justice".

The proposal would see the relatively high SB secret police pensions lowered to the current monthly average paid out by the state-run ZUS social security system, which is around 400 Euros (\$450). "We want a societal sense of justice to win out. There's no support for officers of the oppressive secret police receiving such high benefits for having stifled the freedom and independence of our country," Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Blaszczak told reporters.

Poland's secret police were much loathed and feared for their political repression and bru-

ality. The SB notably abducted, tortured and murdered dissident priest Jerzy Popieluszko, a key figure in Poland's 1980s anti-communist Solidarity movement.

The government plan would affect around 32,000 people and would yield savings of more than 30 million Euros per year, according to Blaszczak. The proposal still needs to be presented in parliament, but it will likely pass since the governing conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party has a majority there. But the measure could theoretically be blocked by the constitutional court, which is currently feuding with the PiS. The government has introduced several controversial reforms since gaining power last year that according to the opposition were intended to paralyze the court. — AFP