

CANDIDATES AIM TO RIDE MACRON WAVE TO PARLIAMENT

PARIS: The leaflets make no mention of the candidates' party, just a splash of color and pledges carefully calibrated to fit with those of the new centrist president. Welcome to campaigning in Emmanuel Macron's France, where moderates of the left and right are hitching their wagons to the new president's star in the hope of winning a seat in upcoming parliamen-

tary elections. "These days, what counts in a pot of yoghurt is the taste, not the label," said Pierre-Yves Bournazel, who is running for a seat in Paris for the conservative Republicans in the two-round vote taking place on Sunday and on June 18. Bournazel is campaigning in the Montmartre area to the north of the French capital, in the shadow of the hill-

top Sacre Coeur church that attracts crowds of tourists.

At 39 - the same age as Macron - Bournazel echoes the desire of France's youngest ever president "to promote new ideas and a new type of political behavior". His leaflets says he wants to help form a "presidential majority", meaning that although he is running on the Republicans ticket Bournazel would support many of Macron's reforms in parliament. His stance - that of dozens of candidates from the Republicans and rival Socialists - reflects the tectonic political shift engineered by Macron, which has left the two major post-war political groupings fighting for survival.

Riding Macron's coattails

Macron has dismissed the traditional left-right divide as old hat, saying the new faultline in French politics is between "progressives" and those opposed to change. To drive home that point he has given politicians from the Socialists and Republicans jobs in his new government, deepening the rift within the parties between those who oppose Macron and those seduced by his pragmatism. In Montmartre, Bournazel's main opponent - Socialist former labor minister Myriam El-Khomri - is also running as someone who would work "with Emmanuel Macron, for a (parliamentary) majority of progress".

The Socialist logo is tucked away at the

bottom of Khomri's campaign poster and the party's trademark rose has disappeared, replaced by a Macron-style blue slick. Explaining her position, the politician behind last year's highly contested reform of the labor code insists that while she is a "woman of the left" she also has "a real understanding of what a culture of compromise means".

The attempts by the candidates to ride on the coattails of the president and his fledgling *Republique En Marche* (Republic on the Move or REM) party has bemused some voters. "The most amazing thing is to see each of them explain to us that they are more 'En Marche' than the next person, when they have been part of their own parties for some time," said Olivier, 49, a Macron supporter in Montmartre.

Unlocking France

Khomri's reluctance to fly her own party's colors is understandable. The Socialists' presidential candidate, Benoît Hamon, scored a humiliating six percent and the former governing party has every reason to fear another rout in the parliamentary elections. Another 15 Socialist candidates are also running under the "presidential majority" banner, irking their party which has accused them of 'opportunism'.

Macron, who had never run for office until he became president, needs a majority in parliament if he is to implement his

ambitious reform agenda. Many of his rivals scoffed when the supremely confident former Rothschild banker vowed he and his fledgling party would blaze a new political trail. Yet having handed him the presidency in a May 7 runoff against far-right leader Marine Le Pen, voters are now changing their voting habits of a lifetime to back REM and its allies.

An Ipsos Steria survey of nearly 15,000 voters last week showed Macron's camp taking 31 percent in Sunday's first round of voting for the National Assembly, well ahead of the Republicans on 22 percent. Another poll showed him going on to win an outright majority of seats at the second round. REM is fielding candidates - many drawn from outside politics, including a former fighter pilot and female bullfighter - in almost every one of the 577 constituencies.

But in constituencies like Montmartre, where the frontrunners are supportive of the president's agenda, it has hung back. "We are seeing a new polarization of the French political landscape which is replacing the old left-right split in favor of a bloc which is more 'elite' and another that is more 'working-class'," political scientist Jerome Sainte-Marie said. "The most liberal candidates on the left and right see in Macron the solution to bogged-down reforms," he said. "This ideological coherence is where Macron's strength lies," he added. —AFP



PARIS: Former Labour minister and French leftwing Socialist Part (PS) candidate for the upcoming legislative elections in the 18th district of Paris, Myriam El-Khomri, gestures as she delivers a speech during a meeting with supporters of the *Republique En Marche* party on June 1, 2017. —AFP

TURKEY STANDS FIRM OVER BAN ON GERMAN VISITS TO INCIRLIK

BERLIN TO FIND ANOTHER LOCATION FOR ITS TROOPS

ANKARA: Turkey and Germany yesterday failed to reach an agreement over visits by German politicians to a key airbase used for raids against the Islamic State group in Syria, with Ankara standing firm on its ban. The Incirlik base in southern Turkey has been at the center of a dispute between the NATO allies since Ankara blocked a visit by German parliamentarians last month. "Right now it is possible to visit the NATO base in Konya (in

light of Turkey's decision, Gabriel said that Germany would soon start the process of finding another location for its troops. Berlin had previously indicated that it would move the personnel elsewhere in the region, most likely Jordan.

Gabriel said that he regretted Turkey's decision, adding that Ankara must understand "for domestic political reasons we will then need to transfer our soldiers". But he added there was not yet

of finding another base," he said. "I believe that we cannot solve the problem with Turkey now." Turkey justified preventing the German parliamentary group from visiting the base by accusing Berlin of having offered political asylum to Turkish nationals who took part in the July 2016 attempted coup.

'Conditions not ripe'

Cavusoglu said yesterday that Turkey had no problem with

shelter in friendly country Germany," he said, referring to a movement led by US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, blamed by Ankara for orchestrating the failed coup.

Gabriel said asylum cases were handled by an independent German authority, and "in the end it is courts which decide, and not the government". Cavusoglu hinted that visits to Incirlik could be possible in the future if unspecified joint steps were taken, but that "Conditions are not ripe right now to visit Incirlik," he said. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim cancelled a planned meeting with Gabriel because of scheduling reasons, an official from the Turkish premier's office said. "The meeting could not take place time-wise," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

But Gabriel met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the presidential palace. Relations between Turkey and Germany have been tense since last July's failed coup but deteriorated over a referendum campaign this year to expand Erdogan's powers. Ties were strained further after Turkish authorities imprisoned a German-Turkish journalist with *Die Welt*, Deniz Yucel, on terror charges. Cavusoglu said that the accusations against Yucel were "not about journalism but terror," and that the "independent judiciary" was leading the investigation in the Yucel case.

Amid worsening relations, Erdogan has repeatedly accused German Chancellor Angela Merkel of "hiding terrorists" in Germany and claimed that Berlin was not responding to 4,500 dossiers sent by Ankara on terror suspects. Turkey is an important country for Berlin, in part because of the roughly three million ethnic Turks in Germany after a "guest worker" program in the 1960s and 1970s. —AFP



ANKARA: German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (left) and Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu shake hands before talks yesterday. —AP

central Turkey), not Incirlik," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said at a news conference with his German counterpart Sigmar Gabriel in Ankara.

Germany has 250 military personnel stationed at Incirlik flying Tornado surveillance missions over Syria and refuelling flights for partner nations battling IS militants. In

any decision or a concrete plan for the relocation of the German troops from Incirlik. Speaking later to journalists at the German embassy, Gabriel said Germany could not station its soldiers at a base where deputies were not able to visit them.

"Therefore, I think we will begin this week or next week the process

Germany, which is a major trade partner, adding: "If Germany takes one step forward toward us, we will always take two steps further." But he said that some facts could not be ignored, claiming that more than 400 Turkish diplomatic or official passport holders had sought asylum in Germany. "We would not like to see members of FETO take



LONDON: Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick (second left) and Mayor of London Sadiq Khan (third right) are shown across London Bridge yesterday to see the site of the June 3 terror attack near Borough Market. —AFP

POLICE MAKE MORE ARRESTS OVER LONDON TERROR ATTACK

LONDON: Police carried out fresh raids and arrested "a number of people" yesterday after the Islamic State group claimed an attack by three men who mowed down and stabbed revellers in London, killing seven people before being shot dead by officers. Saturday night's rampage at a popular nightlife hub around London Bridge by men wearing fake suicide vests was the third deadly terror attack in Britain in less than three months and came only days before a general election.

"A number of people have been detained," police said in a statement after two early morning raids in east London, as commuters returned to the scene of the attacks after some security cordons were removed. "A very high priority for us is to try to understand whether they were working with anybody else," London police chief Cressida Dick told BBC television. Dick said police had seized "a huge amount of forensic material" after going through the van used in the attack "very, very carefully". "We will change and adapt to what appears to be a new reality for us," she said.

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Sunday blamed "evil" Islamist ideology and vowed to crackdown on extremist content online worldwide, warning that attackers were "copying one another". National campaigning for Thursday's general election resumed on Monday after a one-day suspension out of respect for the victims, who included 48 people treated in hospital for injuries. Of those, 21 are still in a critical condition. Police said on Sunday

they were holding 11 people, all arrested in raids on two addresses in Barking in suburban east London.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility. "A detachment of fighters from Islamic State carried out London attacks," said the Amaq news agency, which is affiliated with the militants. One Canadian national and one Frenchman were among the fatalities and seven French citizens were among the injured. No details have been released about the perpetrators, who were shot dead within eight minutes of the first call to the police. Eight officers fired an "unprecedented" 50 rounds at the three attackers, according to Mark Rowley, head of national counter-terrorism policing, who said that a bystander had also suffered a gunshot wound.

'Copying one another'

The prime minister said the attack was driven by the same "evil ideology of Islamist extremism" behind the May 22 Manchester suicide bombing that left 22 people dead, and the Westminster attack in March, which killed five. The assailants ran people over on London Bridge before lunging seemingly at random at the crowds gathered around Borough Market, which is full of restaurants and bars. Gerard Vowls, 47, said he saw a woman repeatedly stabbed, and threw chairs, glasses and bottles at the attackers in a bid to stop them. "They kept coming to try to stab me... they were stabbing everyone. Evil, evil people," he told *The Guardian* newspaper. —AFP

CYPRUS LEADERS TO PUSH ON WITH REUNIFICATION TALKS

UNITED NATIONS: Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders agreed Sunday to return to the negotiating table later this month in a new bid to clinch a historic deal on reunifying the island. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced the new round of talks following a four-hour dinner meeting with the two leaders at UN headquarters in New York. Guterres had invited Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart Mustafa Akinci to salvage a two-year diplomatic effort aimed at achieving a settlement in Cyprus.

Flanked by the two leaders, Guterres told reporters after the lengthy meeting that all three had "agreed on the need to reconvene the conference on Cyprus in June". No firm date was announced, but Guterres said he would consult with Britain, the European Union, Greece and Turkey on the timing. The UN-led talks hit a wall nine days ago after the sides failed to agree on the terms to advance the reunification talks toward a final summit.

The eastern Mediterranean island has been divided since 1974, when Turkish troops invaded its northern third in response to an Athens-inspired coup seek-

ing union with Greece. The Greek Cypriot side demanded that the withdrawal of Turkish troops be discussed at the conference in Geneva as part of security arrangements. But the Turkish Cypriots maintained

that the conference should focus on broader issues of power-sharing, property rights and territory for the creation of a new federation. Turkey maintains some 35,000 troops in the north of the island. —AFP



NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres makes a statement after hosting talks with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci (left) and Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades at the UN headquarters on Sunday. —AP

QUESTIONS WHETHER ISRAEL CONSIDERED ATOMIC BLAST

JERUSALEM: Research suggesting Israel may have considered detonating an atomic device on the eve of the Six-Day War 50 years ago to deter its Arab neighbors sparked debate and denials yesterday. Israel's presumed status as the Middle East's sole nuclear-armed nation remains a highly taboo subject for the country, which neither confirms nor denies such capability. The foreign ministry declined to comment, but one minister who has also written a book on the Six-Day War dismissed the claim.

Research by Avner Cohen, a historian who specializes in Israel's nuclear program, sparked the debate coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Six-Day War, fought from June 5-10, 1967. The research was published yesterday on the website of the US-based Wilson Center think tank, whose work includes tracking nuclear proliferation. Findings were also published over the weekend in the *New York Times*.

Cohen's research includes interviews with

Yitzhak Yaakov, a retired Israeli brigadier general who had been head of weapons research and development. Yaakov, who died in 2013, told Cohen that in 1967 he came up with a plan called "Samson" or "Shimshon" in Hebrew that would involve detonating an "improvised" atomic device purely as a warning. Yaakov stressed that Israel had not yet developed a nuclear bomb. The plan called for it to be detonated atop a mountain in the eastern Sinai Peninsula some 20 km from the Abu Ageila Egyptian strategic military complex.

Cohen wrote that "a small paratroop force would have diverted the attention of the Egyptian army in the area to allow the team to prepare the nuclear demonstration upon an order from both the prime minister and the chief of staff".

The blast would have been seen "for many tens (of) kilometres throughout the Sinai and the Negev" desert, he wrote. "Look, it was so natural," a transcript on the Woodrow Center's website quoted Yaakov as saying. —AFP